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"So I Can Speak Two Speaks":
Identifying the Conditions Necessary for Primary Modern Foreign Languages to be Introduced in the Republic of Ireland

Brendan Duignan

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ABSTRACT

While many benefits have been broadly claimed regarding the learning of modern foreign languages (MFL), including cognitive, employability, intercultural awareness and broader academic achievement, (O'Brien, 2017; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004; Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994), the Republic of Ireland is the sole European jurisdiction where a MFL is neither compulsory nor a non-statutory option at any level within the education system (Eurydice, 2017). Despite the apparent successful of attempts to alter this through the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative, established in 1998, (MLPSI, 2012; Harris and Conway, 2002) its abolition in 2012 left something of a 'linguistic vacuum' in its wake, with no official direction on modern foreign languages at primary level in any form.

Given that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has recently advocated the potential inclusion of a MFL at primary level in its Draft Curriculum Framework, (NCCA, 2019) this timely study endeavoured to answer several secondary research questions and one primary research question: *What are the perceived ideal conditions that would be necessary for a modern foreign language (MFL) to be introduced at primary level in the Republic of Ireland?*

The qualitative research approach in this study is grounded in a largely interpretivist paradigm, drawing on foundations of social constructionism and involved two qualitative instruments: qualitative surveys and focus groups. Participants were key stakeholders in education, including primary teachers, primary principals, pupils from 6th class (12-year-olds) and 3rd year students (15-year-olds). All participants completed a qualitative survey, while focus groups were held with primary teachers and primary principals. Analysis of the data indicated that while there was general positivity conveyed by participants in relation to the potential introduction of a primary modern foreign language, concerns emerged, such as curriculum overload, staffing and the development of staff-capacity, resourcing and the place of the Irish language. It was also clear from the data that a 'one size fits all' approach would not be suitable given the broad profile of schools across the primary system in Ireland. Overall, the triangulated, analysed data made some very noteworthy claims, and the findings indicate a broad range of key elements that, if implemented effectively, could provide policymakers with the potential conditions for introducing a modern foreign language at primary level.

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DEDICATION

To my dad, Cyril Duignan, who really encouraged me to start this process.

Unfortunately, he did not live to see its conclusion.

Love you Dad.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
DES	Department of Education and Skills
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
MFL	Modern Foreign Language
PMFL	Primary Modern Foreign Language
MLPSI	Modern foreign languages in Primary Schools Initiative
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Languages are the bedrock of the world's cultural heritage. Every language offers a rich and unique insight into different ways of thinking and living as well as into the history of the myriad of cultures and peoples across the globe."
(Tinsley and Board (2017), Languages for the Future p.4)

1.1 Introduction:

Despite the many acclaimed benefits to the learning of modern foreign languages, including cognitive, employability, intercultural awareness, broader academic achievement, (O'Brien, 2017; Curtain and Dahlberg, 2004; Bialystok and Hakuta, 1994), the Republic of Ireland is the sole European jurisdiction where a modern foreign language (MFL) is neither compulsory at any level within the education system, nor a non-statutory option at primary level (Eurydice, 2017). While it has been increasingly obvious that a progression of early MFL teaching has occurred across Europe over the past two decades, (Eurydice, 2012; Eurydice, 2017; Dendrinos, 2010), Ireland experienced a more 'reverse evolution', moving from a successful, European-funded, Pilot Project in Modern Languages (1998) (Harris and O'Leary, 2007) towards a Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI) (2001), funded under the National Development Plan, until its unmitigated abolition (MLPSI, 2012). At that point, the initiative had 546 participant schools, with over 23,000 pupils being taught per year, amounting to over 200,000 pupils over its existence (MLPSI, 2012). However, with the onset of a Draft Primary Curriculum in Ireland, so returned the potential for a MFL as a subject at primary level (NCCA, 2020).

1.2 Aims of the Research:

The aims of this study might appear deceptively simple: to ascertain reasons for the absence of a MFL in the primary curriculum in Ireland as well as identifying if it could indeed be implemented, and if so, how? In conducting the research with this in mind, its originality becomes apparent. In making its original contribution to research, this study provides its own input to the primary MFLs (PMFLs) debate which continues today. The study has a particular set of research questions, and generates unique findings from a specific sample, in order to inform both sides of the discussion. It seeks to find the common ground; the necessary adjustments needed in the primary school curriculum and system for a primary MFL to be successfully introduced. Given the potential introduction of a primary MFL into the recent Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020), the findings from this study will be extremely valuable and will provide educators and policymakers with important, informed recommendations, giving a voice to key stakeholders in the primary education system. According to Paine and

McCann (2009), a stakeholder "is an individual or group with an interest in the success of an organization in fulfilling its mission—delivering intended results and maintaining the viability of its products, services and outcomes over time" (p.4). It is in this first part: "an interest in the success" of the schools in which they teach, and the overall education system in which they operate, that the stakeholders' voices are critical.

In their survey of the Irish public on education, Kellaghan, McGee, Millar and Perkins (2004) found 78.7% of respondents considered the teaching of a continental language in primary school to be 'very important/important' in achieving the objectives of schooling (p.35). This, at a time when the vast majority of pupils were not being taught the subject. Reflecting on this statistic, along with two extremely positive evaluations of the MLPSI (Harris and O'Leary, 2007; Harris and Conway, 2002), which involved a combination of garnering perceptions from a selection of pupils, teachers and principals (from a selection of MLPSI schools), along with a summative assessment of the language learning that took place, awoke in me a form of cognitive dissonance. Despite this, albeit small-scale success, why does the MLPSI, or an alternative programme or initiative not exist? In the absence of any clear guidance or direction regarding a MFL, a vacuum exists whereby schools are, arguably, being dissuaded from teaching one. Consequently, it became an area of curiosity for this researcher, which eventually culminated in the development of a research question:

What are the perceived ideal conditions necessary for successful implementation of a primary MFL curriculum in the Republic of Ireland?

While not making any grand claims that the findings of this study will produce a conclusive blueprint for the implementation of a primary MFL (PMFL) programme/curriculum in the Republic of Ireland, this study intends, nonetheless, to provide something of a 'vignette' of perceptions and attitudes to MFL learning at primary level in Ireland. It will aspire to gather attitudes from a variety of key stakeholders both with and without experience of the MLPSI (teachers, Principals and pupils (6th class/primary and 3rd year/secondary)). Three subsets of secondary research questions have refined the 'prima facie' foci of the study which will be presented later in this thesis. If we take Payne and Payne's assertion that, "in research we work from 'knowing less' towards 'knowing more'" (2004, p.114), it was envisaged that some very thought-provoking and useful data would be produced. These questions have been partly determined by the pilot study, which was initially conducted in addition to the empirical

literature reviewed. There was certainly the prospect of the law of unintended consequences playing a role, as new questions and themes emerged from the data. However, it is this researcher's belief that the secondary questions which will be presented in Chapter 5, represent most of the pieces necessary to complete the jigsaw.

The research questions for this study emanated from the professional experience of the researcher as primary school teacher, Regional Advisor with the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative, presenter at various conferences nationally and internationally, as well as guest lecturer on various initial teacher training/education courses in Ireland. It has always been interesting to investigate primary education from the many points of view of the various stakeholders, teachers, pupils, principals, trainees, trainers, policymakers etc, and as a result, broad-reaching questions were used in this study in order to ascertain the participants' genuine opinions on the matter of primary MFLs. In addition, an amalgam of empirical studies and official documentation combined to provide evidence to support the necessity for this study, identifying key questions and gaps in the present knowledgebase of research.

1.3 Terminology Clarification

Before continuing, it would be prudent to present four key terms that will be used at various points throughout the chapters. Firstly, the use of the country name 'Ireland', will be used to imply the 'Republic of Ireland'. Additionally, regarding language acquisition, L1 will signify, and indeed be interchangeable with 'mother tongue,' 'first language' or 'native language'. L2 will imply 'second language learned' or 'first additional language learned'. Finally, due to their extensive use across both the empirical research, and current terminology assigned to it in the most recent official documents in Ireland (NCCA, 2020), the terms MFL and PMFL will be used throughout the thesis, in relation to the terms ML (Modern Language) or Primary Language.

1.4 Why Learn Languages?

In the current multilingual, interconnected, global society, it could be argued that language learning is no more than simply using an application such as Google Translate (Kenny and Barnes, 2019). However, as Kenny and Barnes assert in their article, despite the potential aid that such an app may offer in a situation where significant linguistic errors do not matter, "…Google Translate doesn't profoundly enrich your brain, your cultural understanding, your capacity for empathy the way that language learning does" (p.12). While Kenny and Barnes' opinion was not

given any evidentiary substantiation, this section will provide such support, and will outline some of the considerable benefits to language learning.

Valdés, Kibler and Philipose (2004) and later, Fox, Corretjer, Webb and Tian (2019) as well as Fox, Corretjer and Webb (2019), did exactly what Kenny and Barnes failed to do, and compiled reasonably comprehensive studies on the benefits of bilingualism and language learning across varying age-groups. All three studies produced extensive, rigorous and cogent analyses of the empirical literature through different time periods. Valdés, Kibler and Philipose's investigation exploring the empirical evidence on language learning and bilingualism from 1961-2004, found that language learning and bilingualism had a significant, positive impact on the learners' cognitive abilities, overall academic achievement, and attitudes and beliefs towards language learning and towards other cultures.

Furthermore, through a "targeted, systematic, methodical, and detailed process" (Fox, Corretjer and Webb, 2019, p.702) both Fox, Corretjer and Webb and Tian, along with Fox, Corretjer and Webb, through their analyses of empirical literature from 2005-2011 and 2012-2019, make a compelling argument for language learning and its benefits, with the most recent review, identifying a broad spectrum of key benefits such as:

- Increased academic achievements (e.g., enhanced language skills in L1)
- Cognitive benefits (e.g., metalinguistic awareness, linguistic processing and reasoning)
- Employability and career enhancement
- Communicative and intercultural competence
- Enhanced creativity

The above themes derived from a systematic process of coding one hundred "relevant articles" (p.702). It is worth noting that the additional potential benefit of 'Aging and Health' was also analysed but the findings were inconclusive.

On completing my own empirical literature review, which will be continued in Chapter 4, similar themes became apparent and will ultimately shape this section. It must be acknowledged that this outline is a condensed overview for the purposes of this study, with the main themes identified and discussed briefly.

1.4.1 Improved Academic Achievements

Various studies have identified correlations between learning a MFL/L2 and improved academic achievement (Taylor and Lafayette, 2010; Modirkhamene, 2006). Studies such as those by Aldosary and Alsutan (2017) have identified significant impact of bilingualism on young learner's literacy in their L1. Modirkhamene's (2006) study, correlated these results, albeit with adult language learners. They performed better than monolinguals on the First Certificate of English Test of reading comprehension. Such findings demonstrate higher academic achievements across generations; however, these studies took place in bilingual settings and may not equate with a second-language learning situation. Cooper (1987) however, studied high school students' results of verbal Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) in the USA who had/had not studied a MFL for at least one year and concluded that there was a correlation between the length of MFL study and higher SAT verbal scores.

1.4.2 Improved Cognitive Abilities and Creativity

A broad gamut of cognitive benefits was assigned to language learning such as improved working memory (Cockcroft, Wigdorowitz and Liversage, 2019), enhanced cognitive flexibility (Tao, Marzecová, Taft, Asanowicz, Wodniecka, 2011) and linguistic aptitude and processing (Thompson, 2013). Additionally, considerable improvements in metalinguistic awareness have been found in language learners, from preschool learners (Diaz and Farrar, 2018) to adult learners (Huang, 2015).

Physiologically, it has also been reported by researchers that learning a language can have a positive impact on grey-matter density. One study asserted that the findings "suggest that the structure of the human brain is altered by the experience of acquiring a second language" (Mechelli, Crinion, Noppeney, O'Doherty, Ashburner, Frackowiak and Price, 2004, p.757).

In terms of creativity, several studies have shown that language learning can enhance creative thinking skills across age-groups of learners (Fürst & Grin, 2018; Ghonsooly & Showqi, 2012). Fürst and Grin, go so far as to assert that language learning skills and bilingualism are "positively correlated to creativity" (p. 352). Again, the crucial issue is that these studies on creativity have been conducted with bilingual participants rather than 'language learners,' limiting the rigour of the studies.

1.4.3 Employability and Career Enhancement

"Employability is widely cited as a key reason to study a language" (Canning, 2009 p.1). Whether for purely diegetic, utilitarian or other reasons, getting a job can be important in society. Studies have shown that there may be some advantages to having a MFL for employability, such as Belpoliti and Pérez (2019), but findings such as these are often based on the context, for example, a professional requirement in the local area/country to be able to communicate in a specific language. In Gallagher-Brett's (2005) research project, culminating in her '700 Reasons to Learn Languages' document, 86% participants stated their expectation for enhanced employability, but, interestingly, did not cite it as being particularly important (p.6). However, not all researchers show a positive disposition towards MFL and employability, as Coleman (2005) claims that the "adoption by Modern Languages of practical, work-related skills as a recruitment slogan has been well-publicised and ineffective" (Coleman, 2005, cited in Canning, 2009, p.2).

1.4.4 Intercultural Awareness

While language proficiency lies at the "heart of language studies" (ACTFL, 2006, p. 3), it is no longer the sole priority of language teaching and learning. In an increasingly globalised world, intercultural competence has become a crucial component in language programmes (Moeller and Nugent, 2014). With this mind, researchers have found intercultural competence to be a significant benefit of language learning. Jiang and Wang (2018), for example, have found in their research that long-term language learning can have a positive impact on intercultural awareness. Barski and Wilkerson-Barker (2019) however found that even one semester of learning a language can provide enhanced intercultural competence.

Intriguingly, in relation to the previous section on employability, Canning (2009) asserts that graduates that have "an intensive knowledge of the cultures and societies of specific countries and experience of living and working overseas develop attributes for employability that language skills alone cannot provide" (p. 9). In order to maximise these benefits, this knowledge, combined with the attitudes and skills of intercultural competence as advocated in Byram's Model of Intercultural Competence (1997) will need to be included in any PMFL in this country.

1.5 Methodological and Philosophical Perspectives

Qualitative methods were selected for the study, given the researcher's interest in both nuance and detail, in addition to a belief in "social reality which stresses the importance of the subjective experiences of individuals in the creation of the social world" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2004, p7). For me, as researcher, my epistemological stance emanates from the individual's construction and interpretation of reality, which can be influenced by a widespread range of factors (Vygotsky, 1987). Looking at the ontological perspective, this study refers to, as Wilson (2013) asserts, "what…constitutes social reality" (p.80). From an axiological, value-based perspective, it is believed that research grounded in polyvocality will "generate more holistic truth about a specific social reality" (Humphrey, 2013, p.8). Additionally, it was crucial that, as researcher, I identify my "…own situation in the world and how [one] perceives it is likely to inform [one's own] ontological position," (Costley, Elliot & Gibbs, 2010, p.81).

Combining all these philosophical beliefs, an interpretivist paradigm drawing on foundations of social constructionism (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Gergen, 1985), was deemed the most suitable as it would allow the researcher opportunities to mine the insights and perceptions of four groups of participants. The first part of the research being a qualitative survey, and the second that of several focus groups (teachers and principals only). Using such instruments and triangulating the data identified how the participants' beliefs and values ultimately determined their perspectives on education in general and languages specifically, which should conceivably yield the most detailed findings. This is an aspect that will be dealt with further in Chapter 5 of the thesis. While using qualitative methods for the research itself, it is important to note that pre-existing statistical data would not be precluded from being used in the study, especially in the literature review chapters.

1.6 Rationale for the Study

My own professional background and philosophical perspectives, combined with a significant paucity of Irish research in this area, is my rationale for undertaking this study. Rather than becoming embroiled in a straightforward binary argument for or against the introduction of primary MFLs, I always felt there should be more 'scratching below the surface' involved in the study. In doing so effectively, an analytical, informed and nuanced thesis would be presented, combining a variety of both empirical and non-empirical documents with data from a unique sample of stakeholders.

When I read Doyé and Hurrell's (1997) declaration that there is simply no argument against the teaching of a MFL, I was buoyed by the enthusiasm conveyed:

> The necessity of teaching at least one foreign language to every European citizen is so obvious that there remains hardly any doubt about its justification. The liberating value of stepping outside one's own culture and one's own language has long been recognized in educational philosophy and the competence to communicate in more than one language has become an accepted postulate of modern educational theory.
>
> (Doyé & Hurrell, 1997, p.9)

However, I was also concerned by the undoubted, incontrovertibility of their assertion. Rather than focus on simply this "necessity" of teaching of a MFL, or primary MFLs (PMFLs), in its narrowest sense, this study has a broad range of issues that it wants to examine and investigate.

Even though there are various studies that suggest the merits of early language learning (Singleton, 1989; Sharpe and Driscoll, 2000; Murphy, Macaro, Alba, & Cipolla, 2014), there is also antithetical research questioning the general findings (Myles, 2017; Birdsong and Molis, 2001). However, if one is to examine early language learning from both an educational (Baker, 2006, Krashen, Scarcella, Long, 1982), as well as an economical (Mulkerne and Grahame, 2011) perspective, significant benefits have been recognised concerning early language learning over the past number of decades. What are these advantages? Why are they important? How do they pertain to the Irish primary school system? These are questions that needed to be asked both in terms of the empirical literature and this study itself.

This research wanted to look at the genuine reasons for (and, indeed, against) the introduction of a PMFL, and in addition to investigate the most appropriate staff-profile to teach the MFL, with arguments for and against generalist v peripatetic specialist teachers. The research also endeavoured to examine the current realities of the primary classroom according to the central stakeholders (teachers and principals), the nuances of pedagogic ideologies and how they potentially might adapt and further develop with such a specialist, new subject. This combination is crucial in order to thoroughly understand the 'curricular space' in which the MFL would need to find itself, for its effective and long-term implementation.

This study will combine a focus on, and capture perceptions from, four key stakeholder groups: primary teachers, primary principals, pupils completing their time in primary school and students about to sit their first state examination. It constitutes an original piece of research, filling a significant gap in the current literature, both on a national and international level. Other research into this area from Ireland, has provided varied findings about PMFLs; for example, investigating the implementation of PMFLs (MLPSI), albeit on a pilot scale (Harris and Conway, 2002; Harris and O'Leary, 2009). Additionally, other research has made comparisons with various jurisdictions while also identifying good practice in Ireland (Keogh-Bryan, 2019). The study on which this thesis is based, makes a unique contribution to research, both in terms of its scope for a literature review, as will be evidenced in Chapters 3 and 4, and its own informative findings from a unique cohort of key stakeholders.

1.7 Outline of the Thesis

The overall structure of this thesis is designed to inform and scaffold the reader through the research process. Chapter 2, for example, will present the historical context of Primary MFLs in the Republic of Ireland over the past four decades, discussing the progression, and indeed, regression of the subject within the Irish primary system. It will, as a result, convey to the reader the broad national perspective for primary MFLs, laying the foundation for subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 will present an analysis of the curricular documents and teacher guidelines that pertain to Primary MFLs in Wales and Ireland. It will also focus on potential future progress of the subject in the respective jurisdictions through investigation of recent, and potential future, developments of Primary MFLs, drawing on official government documents and initiatives.

The fourth chapter of the thesis is an analysis of the empirical literature on the topic of Primary MFLs. A variety of areas are investigated, such as perceptions of stakeholders, and the benefits of early language learning, but also there is particular emphasis on studies from Ireland and Wales, to link to, and indeed build on, the content of chapter three.

Chapter 5 will present the methodology of the study and the philosophical perspectives underpinning the research. The study is two-phased (surveys and focus groups) and qualitative in nature, and this chapter will discuss each method in turn, identifying its appropriateness for

the research in question. It will also discuss the positionality of the researcher, their reflexivity and the ethical implication that may be involved in the studies.

The results from the qualitative survey phase of the research will be presented in Chapter 6, with the findings presented in relation to the questions of the survey. The chapter will present the general educational contexts of the participant groupings and will also show the findings from both the closed and open-ended questions from the survey. This chapter will provide a foundation for the subsequent chapter.

The seventh chapter will present the findings that were generated from the four focus groups. Firstly, the process of conducting the focus groups and the selection of participants will be discussed, including the general school backgrounds of the participants. The findings will then be presented in relation to the secondary research questions of the study.

Chapter 8 will feature an analysis of the findings from the study. It will critically analyse the findings and contextualise them in relation to the literature. It is envisaged that by the end of this chapter, noteworthy evidence will have been generated in terms of all the research questions.

This leads to the final chapter, which will present conclusions and recommendations from the study and present them under each of the research questions to demonstrate the depth of findings from the research and their worth on a larger scale. Linking the conclusions to previous literature will allow for purposeful recommendations to be made in relation to any potential introduction of a primary MFL. While not necessarily providing a definitive roadmap, it will nevertheless provide the necessary components for its implementation.

1.8 Conclusion

2020 was the year when a MFL was given a place at the primary curriculum 'table', however tentative that might have been, in the draft framework (NCCA, 2020). Nevertheless, the discussion has begun. Following on from Keogh-Bryan's (2019) research on the topic and complementing her findings with quite different research, this study fits exactly where it should in the research space, providing significant information from stakeholders to decision makers on what are the perceived ideal conditions that would be required in the primary system before (and indeed while) a MFL is implemented. This study gives stakeholders a tangible voice, from pupils to principals. It gives their opinions validity and, when examined meticulously through

the research process, creates information threads that ultimately, form a collective tapestry. Whether one individual participant, or several, conveyed an opinion, it is valued and contextualised in this research, and when linked to previous research on the topic, will demonstrate a rigorous and worthwhile study, at a crucial time for the research topic itself. The following chapter will explain this relevance, through an examination of the place of MFLs in the Republic of Ireland over recent decades. This has a fundamental bearing on the research itself and will establish the foundations on which the framework of the research is ultimately built.

CHAPTER 2: PRIMARY MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN IRELAND: THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

"One language sets you in a corridor for life.
Two languages open every door along the way."
Frank Smith (1992) To Think: In Language, Learning and Education

2.1 Introduction

The learning of languages has always had a significant place at primary level in Ireland (Harris, 1991). During this time, and indeed for all the compulsory time in education (from age 6-16), most pupils must study two languages: Irish and English. However, despite the significant place for languages in the education system, the introduction of a potential third language into the primary school curriculum has had a varied (Harris, 1991), and it could be argued, ultimately fruitless journey. For the reader to best comprehend the research carried out in this study, as well as to understand its rationale, this chapter will present the historical context of MFLs at primary level in Ireland.

2.2 Primary MFLs in Ireland: Lacking Clear Direction

There has always been a paucity of research, and indeed reference of any kind, to the teaching and learning of MFLs at primary level in Ireland (Harris, 1991). However, the debate has certainly existed since, at least, the 1980s. The discussion paper from the Irish Curriculum and Examinations Board (1985) presented the argument, with some confidence, that "…clearly the introduction to foreign languages at an early age is conducive to improved achievement at post-primary level, which has consequences both cultural and economic for the country" (p.34). The National Parents' Council in Ireland (1989) supported this stance, making the assertion that "the earlier the child is introduced to any language the easier the language acquisition becomes" (p.2).

Nevertheless, despite this relatively positive disposition towards its introduction, the Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (1990), decided firmly against recommending the introduction of a MFL into the primary curriculum. The arguments put forward by the Review Body related to time and curriculum overload, which has since been echoed in other reports and reviews (INTO, 2004; NCCA, 2005), whist referring to the demands of the teaching of the two language programmes already in the system. The substantial arguments of an overloaded curriculum and time are not merely themes and topics of previous reports, or even what could

be termed 'convenient excuses', they currently exist within the primary system, as will be attested later in this thesis.

While acknowledging these points, the Irish National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (the official advisory body on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools), in its discussion document on *Culture and Communication: Foreign Languages in the Primary Curriculum* (1993), offered an alternative view. It recommended the establishment of a pilot project for the teaching of primary MFLs. The document presented a selection of reasons in favour of its introduction, but also highlighted two vital elements necessary for its potentially successful implementation: the importance of quality teaching and primary/secondary transition (NCCA 1993, p.9). Such a recommendation was not in a vacuum for long. Within two years, came the publication of the Government's *White Paper on Education: Charting our Education Future* (Department of Education, 1995). A change of policy was being plotted, with the document making three significant points:

- The importance of European awareness
- The introduction of European languages, life and culture to primary schools (p.22).

In addition, the Government, at that time, also gave a commitment to contribute fully to education initiatives within the European Union (p. 205), thus laying the foundation for the introduction of primary MFLs, albeit on a relatively small scale.

2.3 Primary MFLs: From Potential to Reality

October 1997 saw this policy change become reality, with the establishment of the *Pilot Project for Modern Languages in Primary Schools*. From an initial applicant number of 1,300 schools, 270 were selected, with the profile of these schools mirroring the primary school system at that time (combination of small, rural schools, large urban schools, Irish-medium schools (*Gaelscoileanna* and *Gaeltacht*-schools), multi-denominational schools and a "significant proportion of schools with designated disadvantaged status" (MLPSI, 2012 p.5). The pilot project now gave the opportunity for hundreds of pupils across Ireland to learn a MFL (chosen from French, German, Spanish and Italian), without having to pay fees for an after-school service, as had historically had the case (Harris, 1991). Initial funding for the project came from both the Department of Education and Skills (DES) (MLPSI, 2012) and the European Social Fund (INTO, 2004). What was noteworthy at the time, was that the DES offered the schools in the

project the option of using their own staff to deliver the MFL programme, or to employ a peripatetic (visiting) teacher instead (MLPSI, 2012). Such an option may be crucial to aid schools in the event of any prospective MFL introduction. Implementing such a staffing system, however, would need more in-depth investigation and analysis.

2.4 An Evolution from Pilot to Initiative

The original aims of this pilot project were:

- To foster positive attitudes towards language learning
- to ensure that greater numbers of children were able to access MFLs at primary level
- to promote diversification in the languages taught at primary level
- to establish links between primary and post-primary schools in the area of MFL teaching (MLPSI, 2012 p.6)

This list of aims was further developed in the draft curriculum document devised by the NCCA in 1999. Further support was provided by the publication of teacher guidelines in 2001. These documents will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

The pilot project became the *Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI)* in 2001 and its funding stream changed, from the European Social Fund to inclusion in the budget for the Government's National Development Plan (NDP) (NCCA, 2001 p.5). In 2002, a cap was placed by the DES on the number of schools coming on stream in the MLPSI. This was however, partially lifted in 2007 with the caveat that any newly participating schools would have their own staff capacity to teach their chosen language (MLPSI, 2012). It is worth considering whether this DES cap influenced the potential long-term feasibility of the MLPSI. Could having a limit on the numbers of schools, have stunted the effective growth of the MLPSI across primary schools? Nevertheless, this policy decision led to a significant change in the teacher profiles within the MLPSI, with most teachers involved at its abolition being staff teachers (56%) (p.63). This ultimately led to an increased cohort of schools having staff-based capacity within the system.

During its lifetime, the number of schools involved doubled from 270 in 1998 to 545 in 2012, and over 200,000 pupils learned a MFL during their primary school years (MLPSI, 2012 p.8). Training for teachers was provided by a combination of school visits by Regional Advisors, Continuing Professional Development seminars and evening courses. There was an additional

option of a post-graduate diploma, (country wide), through a collaboration with various Institutes of Technology (MLPSI, 2012). Additionally, a two-phased evaluation of the programme (both Pilot Project and MLPSI) was undertaken by Harris and Conway (2002) and Harris and O'Leary (2009). Both research documents indicate the programme's successes and will be analysed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Despite these significant accomplishments, subsequent reports (INTO, 2004; NCCA, 2005; NCCA, 2008) advised against the full implementation of a primary MFL for a variety of reasons. These included the lack of a coherent strategy on languages (INTO, 2004), and the NCCA (2005) advocating the need for complete implementation of the, then, *new* curriculum before introducing a MFL. Ultimately however, this became DES policy, and in 2012 during economic difficulties for the country, the MLPSI was abolished. Whether or not such an action could be considered an error on the part of the DES is something that can only be considered in the context of the recommendations already alluded to, and in conflict with the successes of the MLPSI up to this point.

2.5 Where Next for Primary MFLs?

Prior to, and, arguably, after the abolition of, the MLPSI, the teaching of MFLs was on an *ad-hoc* and inchoate basis, with no coordinated plan or strategy in place for implementation or development. However, recent changes in policy have seen the establishment of the Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education (2017-2026) which seeks to "set out a roadmap to put Ireland in the top ten countries in Europe for the teaching and learning of foreign languages, through a number of measures targeted at improving proficiency, diversity and immersion." Whether or not this strategy is merely something of a politically influenced aspiration, will be determined by time and future actions. It must be acknowledged however, that the NCCA's two-phased review of the primary curriculum, which in its most recent document seeks to "include new and expanded areas of learning such as … MFLs..." (2019, p.9) has demonstrated that there may be a real and tangible policy-shift regarding primary MFLs. This recommendation was further advanced in 2019 and 2020. In 2019, the NCCA commissioned a report into primary MFLs (Keogh-Bryan, 2019), and subsequently drafted its new Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020). Both of these advocate the inclusion of a MFL in the primary curriculum. The Draft Framework is undergoing a consultation phase with key stakeholders until 2022.

Before concluding this brief but key chapter, it is important to identify the justification for its inclusion, and indeed its significant role in the narrative being presented in this thesis. What should be reflected upon, reading this chapter, is the historic inconsistencies regarding the perceived value of primary MFLs in the Republic of Ireland over many decades. In addition, the evaluated successes of the introduction of the MFL as a subject in primary school through the MLPSI, and very importantly, the potential future role of a MFL within an integrated language curriculum and primary curriculum framework. The appraisal of the MLPSI (Harris and O'Leary, 2007; Harris and Conway, 2002), as will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, was generally positive about the MLPSI as a pilot project/initiative. As a result, the evaluations provided key evidentiary support for both this study and the potential of PMFLs in Ireland. It also, in its two-part evaluation, raised some important concerns which would need to be addressed for any future progress to be made in this regard. It is vital to be aware, that the reported successes of an opt-in pilot project/initiative are not necessarily generalizable. They do not definitively translate to being a mandatory, equally efficacious, universal implementation of a new subject such as a MFL. It is in the zone between pilot/initiative and potential statutory status in the curriculum, that this research finds itself; seeking to garner perceptions and ultimately inform the future journey of PMFLs.

The following chapter will serve as a prelude to the empirical literature of Chapter 4. It presents an analysis of official documentation in relation to the teaching of PMFLs in the Republic of Ireland and, in order to present a sound and reasonable comparison, in Wales. Offering an exploration of documentation in this way, prefaces the review in Chapter 4, presenting how theory and empirical research translate into official policy within a jurisdiction.

CHAPTER 3: MODERN FOREIGH LANGUAGES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A REVIEW OF PRESCRIPTIVE GREY LITERATURE

"Function and form, action and knowledge are mutually dependent. Action without knowledge is blind, vacuous. Knowledge without action is sterile.
Finding the correct balance is the key to successful learning and teaching."
(John Trim, 2001)

3.1 Introduction

In order to present two distinct perspectives on the topic of primary MFLs, this section of the thesis will be divided into two separate chapters. Presenting the chapters in such a way, demonstrates that this chapter, in discussing and analysing official documentation, serves as an effective preamble to the empirical literature. It provides the reader with tangible links between policy and practice. Before outlining the two chapters, it is important to present an academic term that will be used in this research review: *'prescriptive grey literature'*. At present, there is no clear term to describe official documents such as curricula or official educational programmes. There is potentially an argument for the term 'grey literature' to be sufficient and it *can* refer to official documents in some capacity, i.e., not in the control of commercial publishers (Adams, Hillier-Brown, Moore, Lake, Araujo-Soares, White, and Summerbell, 2016). However, it generally describes "the unpublished, non-commercial, hard-to-find information that organizations such as professional associations, research institutes, think tanks, and government departments produce" (University of Michigan, no date, accessed 2020). Despite a possible overlap with the documents being reviewed in this chapter, its appropriateness for this purpose is questionable, and as the documents to which we are referring are ultimately *prescribing* a set curriculum or programme, this researcher recommends that the term '*prescriptive grey literature'* (PGL) be used. Adams et al. (2016) give two important and pertinent reasons for using grey literature in a review, that could be applicable for PGL. Firstly, to "reduce the impact of publication bias", and secondly, it can "provide useful contextual information" (p.2). While both assertions informed my own thinking as researcher, it was the latter that justified the use of PGL: contextualising policies, establishing how they would be put into actual practice, and linking directly to empirical evidence reviewed in Chapter 4.

The current chapter will present and review the PGL pertaining to primary MFLs in the Republic of Ireland and, as a comparative, in Wales. Introducing this type of official literature and allowing the reader to comprehend the similarities and differences from the two jurisdictions will, to some

extent, become a preface to the next chapter of the Literature Review, featuring the empirical studies. The review is presented similarly in this study because empirical literature would be insufficient. However, when linked directly to the content of this chapter, it can, as Adams et al. (2016) assert, enhance the contextualisation of the research. Wales was selected as the comparative jurisdiction, rather than other notably multilingual nations (e.g., Finland), two reasons: its geographical proximity to the Republic of Ireland, as well as its linguistic similarities, i.e., the status of the English language, while its national language, as in Ireland, remains a compulsory subject at primary level. It is important to note that the methodologies used in developing the literature review will be described in detail in the introduction to the next chapter.

3.2 Rationale for Reviewing Prescriptive Grey Literature

In order to robustly contextualise the research being carried out, it would be imprudent to ignore the government-authored, official 'prescriptive' literature already published about primary MFLs. Such documents have influenced, and in turn *been* influenced, by the empirical studies on the topic, providing, and being the result of, hypotheses of various research studies. The central research question of this study, that of identifying the ideal conditions for a MFL curriculum to be implemented at primary level in Ireland, became the lens through which the curricular documents would be reviewed. It could be argued that the implementation of any curricular subject, statutory or not, permanent or pilot, would involve the acknowledgement of direction and advice from the official, original, curricular documents. Taking on board the content of these documents should indeed aid any new documentation to advance the curriculum, without impeding its development. Additionally, any official advisory document could also come under the PGL 'umbrella,' thus further expanding on intentions regarding the primary curriculum, even if not yet implemented.

3.3 The Documents to be Reviewed

In this chapter an examination of two types of official documents will set the tone for the empirical research review. To begin with, the aims, rationale and general curriculum for the two curricular documents will be investigated using two pairs of official curricular documents from the two comparative countries:

Table 1: Prescriptive Grey Literature for Review

Documents from Wales	Documents from Ireland
• *Draft Curriculum for Wales 2022: Languages, Literacy and Communication (Welsh Government, 2019).* • *Global futures: Modern Foreign Languages plan (Welsh Government, 2015).* • Welsh *Framework for Modern Foreign Languages at Key Stage 2* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008) • *Modern Foreign Languages: Guidance for Key Stages 2 and 3* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008) • *Supporting triple literacy: language learning in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 (Welsh Assembly Government, (2011)* in Wales.	• *Draft Curriculum Guidelines Pilot Project on Modern Languages in the Primary School* (NCCA, 1999) • *Modern Languages in Primary Schools Teacher Guidelines* (NCCA, 2001) • *Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026* (DES, 2017). • *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework for Consultation* (NCCA, 2020).

In addition, an analysis of the most recent government documents containing any mention of the implementation of primary MFLs will be presented, as they form and present, the future aspirations for primary MFLs in both jurisdictions. These documents include:

While the place of two 'first' languages in the jurisdictions are important from a comparative viewpoint, it is important to note that the PGL selected, contrast in terms of their relative production. The Irish documents are from twenty years ago, and the Welsh documents are eight years later. This may have implications in terms of the language teaching/learning trends that informed their development.

3.4 Prescriptive Grey Literature from Ireland

Interestingly, despite being officially a draft, the curriculum document from Ireland mirrors the approach of the other curriculum documents in their format: "This draft Curriculum has been developed within the framework of the revised primary curriculum" (NCCA, 1999, p.14). Additionally, it is interesting that the 'Teacher Guidelines,' produced two years later, do not have the same caveat in the title. This may have been for a trivial reason, such as an oversight or editing error. However, the reason for the absence of 'Draft' in the naming of the document may have had more significance, with the integration of MFLs into the curriculum potentially having a longer-term footing.

3.4.1 Espousing Positivity

While the potential of this longer-term vision for the implementation of the language curriculum is a moot point given its abolition in 2012, nevertheless, the positivity espoused by both Irish documents in relation to language learning is clearly obvious. Both undoubtedly advocate the importance of learning another language which, according to the curriculum guidelines, "…contributes towards the development of the child's personal, cognitive and social skills" (NCCA, 1998, p.5). Such a favourable attitude is echoed further in the teacher guidelines (NCCA, 2001) where it is emphasised that there "…are many advantages associated with the introduction of a MFL at primary level (p.9)." The guidelines even go so far as to point out a variety of key advantages associated with learning a primary MFL: enjoyment, development of language skills and confidence, whilst highlighting its contribution to the child's cognitive development. The teacher guidelines make clear the benefits in relation to the strands of the curriculum:

> In learning another language, the child is afforded insights into another culture, focuses on elements of language awareness, learns that effective communication can be achieved using another language, and appreciates that in understanding another language, communication with their peers in a much greater arena is possible (NCCA, 2001, p.11).

This zeal contrasts with some of the reports discussed in the previous chapter, and by presenting such key information, it becomes increasingly clear, that at the time of development, the intention was, consciously or otherwise, to retain the MFL for a considerable amount of time,

making it arguably an anchor point within the primary education system. The language learning experience will always be of benefit to the child.

3.4.2 Approaches Advocated and Strands Studied

In Ireland, the draft curriculum guidelines are directed at pupils in 5th and 6th classes only and promote and advocate a communicative approach to teaching the language, making the important point that "…it is not a method…" but would instead, use a combination of varying methodologies. In using such an approach, the focus is clearly on the learner as individual, with their own interests, learning strengths and needs. The communicative approach works on developing 'real communication' between pupil participants, which "concentrates on the needs and interests of the learner" (NCCA, 1999 p.20), as opposed to the "…grammatically correct transmission of structures" (p.6). Not only is this real communication being espoused in the documents, but it is also conveyed as the key component of the language learning experience, both from enjoyment and achievement points of view. The teacher guidelines assert that due to this approach "…and an emphasis on the enjoyable aspect of language learning (through engaging the child in a task-based approach), all children can experience success with their peers from an early stage" (p.12). Such an approach serves to demonstrate a significant paradigm shift in the teaching/learning of a MFL in comparison to previous language teaching methods, for example, the Grammar-Translation method, or the Direct and Structural method (Bowen, 2012). An important point to note, is that the teacher guidelines advise that the approaches and methodologies be read in conjunction with the *Developing the Topics* section of the draft curriculum document (NCCA, 1998).

It is clear therefore, that the learning of the language is as important (or even more so) than the teaching of the language. Enabling and empowering the learner in a fun way, developing their own sense self-worth is paramount in the teacher guidelines, as this "…positive and enjoyable language learning experience will contribute towards the development of the self-confidence and self-esteem of all children (p.12)." The two language-specific strands of the MFL curriculum (Communicative Competence and Language Awareness) reinforce this method. This enables the language learner to use the acquired language in a variety of contexts while also developing a keen interest in how language works. Combining these strategies in the language learning experience can bring real success in terms of acquiring and using language (Davies and Pearse,

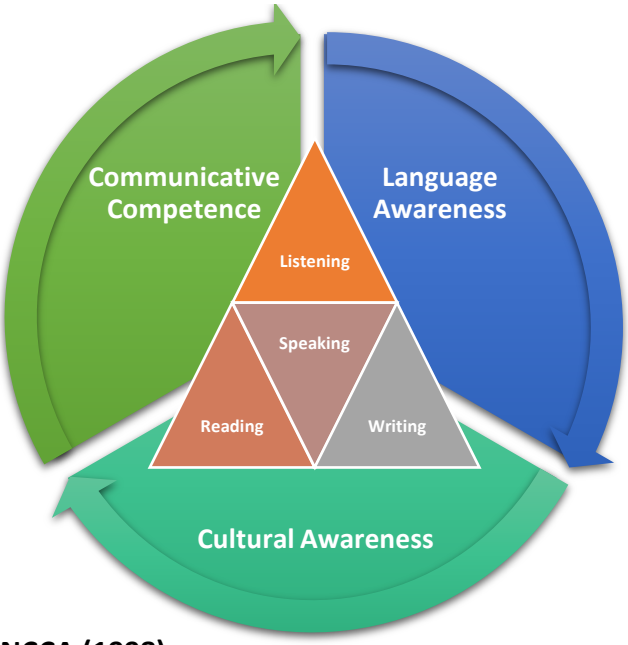
2000; Jing, 2006). The third strand of the curriculum, 'Cultural Awareness', while logically integrating with the other strands, shifts the focus slightly. IT highlights a broader language-learning objective, which is now termed *intercultural communicative competence* (Mede and Gunes, 2019).

Deardorff (2006) describes the teaching of intercultural communicative competence as enabling the learner to interact, not only on an effective communicative level, but also appropriately in intercultural social situations. It teaches an understanding of culturally appropriate attitudes and knowledge. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the role and relevance of cultural competence has increased extraordinarily, across society, not only in educational circles, but particularly in business and economic situations (Williams, 2001; Morosini and Ulrich, 2005; Barrera, 2010). It could be argued therefore, that its place in education is pivotal. Enabling pupils to ask questions such as 'What is culture?' and 'How does our culture compare and contrast with other cultures?', is imperative for broadening their horizons (Jones and Coffey, 2006). It also opens their eyes to the maxim of 'making the strange familiar and the familiar strange', developing the idea further.

Through the introduction of Cultural Awareness as a strand in the MFL curriculum, its significance is emphasised and its place anchored, as part of learning a MFL, essentially affirming Jones and Coffey's contention that "cultural enrichment has been seen as a key benefit of language learning" (p.137). Taking all the strands in isolation, it becomes increasingly apparent that integration of the three, enhances the language-learning experience for the pupils.

As already presented, there are three strands in the draft curriculum. There are also four strand units, essentially based on the four language skills at the time of development: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (see Figure 1). The integration of all three strands and all four strand units affirms the broader language-learning experience being developed. However, this is one area that certainly could be altered as more recent documents (IILT, 2003 MLPSI, 2005), suggest a fifth language skill, with 'Speaking' being divided into two individual skills of 'Spoken Production' and 'Spoken Interaction'.

Figure 1: The Draft Modern Languages Curriculum (Three Strands and Four Strand Units)



Source: Adapted from NCCA (1998)

3.4.3 The Role of the Teacher

As in every classroom, the teacher guiding and scaffolding the pupils through their learning experiences is pivotal. In terms of language-teaching, that is no different. They are both the '*guide on the side*', facilitating the pupils in the learning process, as well as the '*sage on the stage*', where the teacher's role is more obvious, imparting knowledge to the pupils. In both documents, the role of the teacher is endowed with great importance. According to the teacher guidelines, the role of the teacher is regarded as "…of the utmost importance in the language class (NCCA, 2001, p.13)", while also being "…the facilitator of the language learning" experience (p.21). This importance is bestowed upon the role for several reasons:

- Linguistic role model: "The teacher must be confident in his or her skills in this area." (p.13)
- Enjoyable teaching methods: The teacher should introduce the pupils to another language in a manner that is both enjoyable, and, age-appropriate
- Planning effectively: The importance of the teacher planning clear aims and objectives for the language lessons
- Use of Assessment, both the pupils' learning and the use of the teacher's own strategies

What is very fascinating in this document, and absent in the other curriculum documents, is the reference to the *profile* of teacher involved in the language learning experience. It acknowledges the important fact that the class teacher of the pupils may not necessarily be the language teacher. The teacher guidelines go so far as to affirm that, "where the language teacher is not a primary school teacher it is essential that he or she familiarise himself or herself with the other areas of the curriculum for fifth and sixth classes (the final years of primary school)" (p.14). Why would the language teacher *not* be a primary school teacher? Is this acknowledging that the MFL teacher may be a language specialist only and not actually a qualified primary teacher? This recognition could open the way for secondary level teachers to teach in the primary classroom. Cognisant of the profile of the teacher, the teacher guidelines also present ways for both the language and non-language experts to upskill linguistically, from simply reading (e.g., books, magazines, and newspapers) in the target language, attending a language/language methodology course, to visiting a country where the target language is spoken. All these points were implemented to a significant extent (MLPSI, 2012), although it is important to acknowledge that the detail conveyed does not, arguably, provide sufficient guidance to effectively upskill.

3.4.4 Other key points from the documents

On reviewing the Draft Curriculum Guidelines, it could be asserted that much of the content is reasonably prescriptive. Describing the Strands and Strand Units, along with their Learning Objectives (LO), as well as providing a list of language functions, provides a framework for planning the language lessons in the classroom. The language teacher still preserves some measure of autonomy in their planning, since the strands and strand units are prescribed, but the topics are purely recommendations. The same can be said of the exemplar activities that are included for each LO. In the teacher guidelines, there is further development of these exemplars as sample lessons, providing important supplementary materials for teachers to use both as teaching and as planning tools.

The teacher guidelines, while obviously referencing the introduction of the ML in the primary classroom, highlights three pivotal elements to aid the teacher when implementing the ML curriculum:

- A summary of the curriculum for the teacher

- Presentation of various approaches and methodologies for use in the ML classroom
- Advice on how to plan for implementing the ML?

Presenting such information in this document, in conjunction with its section on the 'Role of the Teacher' justifies its title (Teacher Guidelines). It seeks to inform, enable and ultimately empower teachers to effectively implement the MFL teaching in the classroom. When taken with the supports offered by the MLPSI (see previous chapter), the potential for success in this area is significant, although if taken in isolation, the teacher guidelines would not be sufficiently detailed.

In planning advice for the MFL, the Teacher Guidelines put forward quite generic direction for teachers, for example, organisational and curriculum planning. An essential point, however, is the emphasis that is placed on the multi-grade classroom. This is grounded in the reality that has always permeated primary education in Ireland, affecting, at that point in time 40% of primary classrooms (Oliver, 2000). Emphasising this point could be construed as a demonstration of how a ML could potentially be feasible in any classroom context, as opposed to imposing a 'one size fits all' approach. However, given the sheer numbers of multi-grade classrooms in Ireland, there is certainly not enough clear guidance for the implementation of the MFL in these contexts. This is a substantial flaw in the document.

However, despite presenting all this important material and guidance to teachers, there remains one significant component that is conspicuous by its absence: transition from primary to secondary, excepting a brief mention in both these official documents. Given the prescriptive nature of the documents, and the level of detail that they provide in other areas of the ML implementation process, omitting the issue of transition is startling, especially given the merit of having a coherent strategy for it (McGee, Ward, Gibbons, Harlow, 2004). This is a vital element of ML implementation that needs to be presented in any future official documents.

Another major nationwide issue is curriculum overload in the Irish primary system (NCCA, 1993; NCCA, 2005; NCCA, 2008; NCCA, 2010, INTO, 2015). Given that this has been a major stumbling block to introducing a ML into primary schools, it is interesting that the teacher guidelines emphasise "…the need to forge links between the content of the language class and other

elements of the curriculum at fifth and sixth-class level" (p.55). Such advocacy of cross-curricular integration affirms the messages of the general primary curriculum, emphasising the fact that the MFL should not be a stand-alone, isolated entity within the curriculum. If implemented effectively, this could prove to be very relevant to the feasibility question in the future, potentially removing a key barrier to progress in ML teaching and learning in Ireland. However, integration alone is not the 'silver bullet' solution to curriculum overload, and it is a significant limitation of the documents that clear and specific guidance is given to practitioners as to how to overcome the issue of an overloaded curriculum. Was this to avoid the admission of its very existence in the first place?

3.5 The Future of Primary MFL Learning in Ireland

2012 saw the abolition of the MLPSI and the end of any official MFL teaching in the primary school system in Ireland. Since then, a vacuum has existed with no official direction appearing from the Department of Education and Skills. In December 2017, (just over twenty years on from the establishment of the Pilot Project for MFLs in Primary Schools), the government launched its *Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026* (DES, 2017). The strategy put forward a blueprint designed to put Ireland and its education system, in the top ten countries in Europe for the teaching and learning of MFLs. Several measures were targeted at improving proficiency, diversity and immersion. According to the Minister for Education and Skills, fundamental, attitudinal change was necessary:

> We need to change our mindset around language learning. There is a significant opportunity for Ireland to excel on the global stage. Our education providers and employers must work together to increase awareness of the importance of gaining proficiency in foreign languages. Parents must act as advocates and motivate their children to learn foreign languages (p.5).

While being perhaps, quite aspirational, this statement highlights key aspects of the language learning process: collaboration among education providers, proficiency in foreign language learning, and the importance of the role of parents in this process. Linked to the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 and working on a whole-system approach, the strategy envisages the development of language learning in its broadest sense and for a wide variety of reasons, wishing to "…promote a society where the ability to learn and use at least one foreign language is taken

for granted, because of its inherent value for individuals, society and the economy" (p.7). Although the focus is throughout the whole education system, it states one noteworthy objective as part of its goal to create a more engaging learning environment:

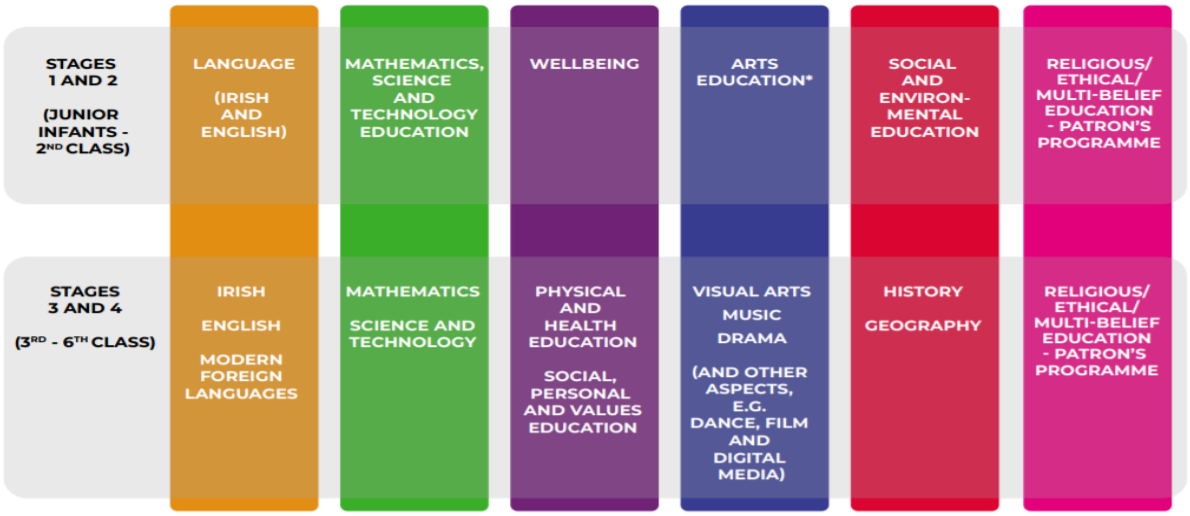
> Ask the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to give consideration to including foreign languages in senior classes as part of its review of the primary curriculum. The Department will consider the recommendations of the review following completion (p.9).

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the NCCA's request to review the curriculum in relation to the introduction of a ML in the primary system, is not the first, and it will be of great interest to ascertain the outcome of its review. It will ultimately decide the future -if there is to be one- of MFLs in primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. During the review process, the NCCA produced a Draft Primary Curriculum Framework document (NCCA, 2020) in order to present a document for consultation, the findings of which will ultimately contribute to the review. The consultation welcomes input from those involved in education, parents, and organisations. During the review, the NCCA found that, when it comes to any potential new primary curriculum in Ireland…

> …there are demands to include new aspects of learning in the curriculum such as Coding and Computational Thinking, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, MFLs, and to place a greater general emphasis on Wellbeing. (NCCA, 2020, p.2)

The framework document takes these elements and expands on their potential inclusion through presenting the draft curriculum as it might be, with four stages, and six curricular groupings (see Figure 2). On reading through the document, it becomes increasingly apparent that the subject of MFLs may have more than a tentative role in the curriculum. From Figure 3, it is evident that MFLs may have a place in the new curriculum, under the 'Language' group, with a view to its introduction from 3rd class in Ireland.

Figure 2: Curriculum Areas and Subjects from the Draft Framework Document



Source: NCCA, 2020, p11

Further elaborating on the potential introduction of a MFL, the NCCA make the point that the new draft curriculum "supports the introduction of MFLs in stages 3 and 4, incrementally building on children's existing knowledge and awareness of language and progressing to a competency model in stage 4" (p13). From this statement, it is important to note that an initial language awareness/sensitisation programme is being proposed in stage 3 (3rd and 4th classes (9-10 year-olds)) which will progress towards a language competency model in stage 4 (final two years of primary school (11-12 year-olds)). Although still tentative and in draft format, taking a combined analysis of both Chapter 2 and this chapter, it is evident that such an inclusion in the draft framework document is notable, in terms of officially introducing and acknowledging the role that the subject of MFLs may have in the revised primary curriculum.

3.6 Prescriptive grey literature from Wales

As with their Irish counterparts, the Welsh government produced both a curricular framework document, as well as a teacher guidelines document for PMFL (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008). A noteworthy, and significant difference, however, is the distinct lack of a defined and 'prescriptive' curriculum in the framework document. It does not, for example, "specify a curriculum model" nor indeed does it align itself with a particular year group nor allocate a specific amount of time to give to the subject. Presenting PMFL in such a way certainly conveys a less formalised and structured subject at primary level in Wales. Deciding whether this is the more effective way to provide support and guidance for teachers is certainly arguable and

ultimately will be proven correct by past/present/future success. Some of this will be discussed in the empirical research review.

3.6.1 Key Stage 2: a non-statutory framework for MFLs

While the framework document explicitly affirms that the programme is "…flexible for schools to use according to their own resources and time available with any year group" (p.27), it does reflect the skills presented in the Key Stage 3 programme of study, i.e., oracy, reading and writing. In making this tangible link between levels, it reinforces the importance of primary-secondary transition, which was notably an important omission in the Irish documents. This important cross-sectoral transition is also highlighted using level descriptions at Key Stage 2. The document states that while…

> …there is no statutory requirement to assess MFLs at Key Stage 2, …if pupils have been studying a MFL, both primary teachers and secondary teachers will want to have some record and/or evidence of the skills that pupils have acquired, whatever the language (p.30).

This record of assessment, interestingly, does not focus solely on teacher-led assessment, and indeed the document presents simplified versions of curricular descriptors for the pupils to self-assess their own language learning record, e.g., "I can greet people, say what some things or people are and answer some questions" (p.31). Using assessment for learning techniques such as this gives ownership to the pupils and essentially shifts the spotlight from the teaching onto the learning. As Jones (2005) asserts:

> Once learners can assess their own work and their current knowledge base, they will be able to identify the gap in their own learning; this will aid learning and promote progress and contribute to the self-management of learning (p.11).

It took several years after the Irish documents were published for this type of descriptor to become part of the MLPSI, albeit in a much more detailed and specific way, through its publication of '*My European Language Portfolio'* (MLPSI, 2005).

As previously stated, the three skills of oracy, reading and writing form the basis of the framework document, but if one is to take these skills as one side of a coin, on the other side, is a range of

activities and experiences through which pupil's skills are developed. These have three key areas: Intercultural Understanding, Language Learning Strategies and Activities and Contexts (p.29). While not necessarily extremely detailed, they are short and readily accessible for teachers (two sides of an A4 page). Perhaps having an easily manageable and practical summary such as this could be a key inclusion in the Irish document.

An interesting inclusion in the Welsh framework document is reference to what is presented as the non-statutory Skills Framework for 3 to 19 year-olds. This framework presents skills for development across the curriculum, and the document has been devised "…in order to provide guidance about continuity and progression in developing thinking, communication, ICT and number for learners from 3–19" (p.6). How the learning of MFLs relates specifically to each of these skills is also presented in the document. Again, this is a particularly practical addition to the document, a version of which could be interesting in future Irish curricular documentation.

3.6.2 MFLs Guidance for Key Stages 2 and 3

Like its curricular 'sibling' document, the MFL guidance, that accompanies the non-statutory MFL framework, focuses mainly on language learning at lower-secondary level (Key Stage 3). In addition, as with the curricular document (six pages out of 34), its importance relative to Key Stage 3 is obvious. Merely twenty-three pages of the document are given over to the non-statutory framework at primary level (Key Stage 2), out of 152 pages. It can be assumed that the non-statutory nature of the subject at primary level is the reasoning behind this more 'succinct' prescriptive literature. In future guidance documents, some of which will be discussed in the next section, it would be worthwhile expanding somewhat on curricular content and educator guidance as its lack of clear direction is a significant limitation of the document.

While being relatively brief, the guidance document (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008) reaffirms important aspects of the framework, such as the lack of specificity regarding the curriculum model, time allocation and assigned year groups. It also endeavours to provide useful advice and exemplification of activities for use in the MFL class. Furthermore, much like its Irish counterpart, it also endorses the importance of cross-curricular integration, identifying the existence of a "range of opportunities to link MFLs with other areas of the curriculum" (p.124),

in addition to the language links across L1, L2 and MFL. While not being explicit here, in referring to integration, the document is providing one potential solution to curriculum overload.

Planning is an essential part of any lesson and the guidance documents provides *some*, albeit arguably generic, advice on how to plan, not only for the language learning skills found in the non-statutory framework, but also for "Implementing the Range" (p.126) (Intercultural Understanding, Language Learning Strategies, Activities and Contexts). It has a significant omission, however, by not having any specific planning advice or planning templates that would be practical in the MFL class. Instead, it provides various examples of activities that could be included in a teacher's planning. The document also provides, again like its Irish counterpart, visual examples of some of the types of activities advocated. Sadly, all the examples of activities are in the French language, which does not echo the message of language diversification as advocated in the Irish documents. These ideas for activities and planning are fittingly followed by a reasonably condensed discussion on progression and the ML, demonstrating how learners move through the language-learning experience under all three areas of oracy, reading and writing. It is envisaged that this progression should enable learners "to use language more independently and creatively" (p.129).

Although planning for progression in language learning is pivotal, it is in the area of primary-secondary transition that medium to long term goals is achieved (or not). What the guidance document communicates is that pupils should, in essence, 'hit the ground running' with regards to learning MFL as it will no longer be a brand-new subject for them, and in pursuing the subject, they should "…have developed a range of language and language learning skills" (p.129). In order to facilitate the transition from a teaching and learning point of view, the structure of the framework is "…the same as for Key Stage 3 and develops the same Skills and Range" (p.129). Another praiseworthy point from the document is that, despite no existence of formal assessment requirements in PMFL, passing on useful information about each learner's own achievements in their language learning experience is supported by the framework. This serves as another useful element of successful transition.

3.6.3 Supporting triple literacy: language learning in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3

The third document to be discussed is ***Supporting triple literacy: language learning in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 (Welsh Government, 2011).*** Again, there is an overlap between Key Stage 2 and 3, however in this document, there are more interspersed references to both sectors, which demonstrates a more 'joined-up thinking' strategy in language learning.

From the foundation level of primary school, the English and Welsh languages are compulsory, albeit interchangeable as L1 or L2 depending on the school circumstances. This third document endeavours to support triple literacy, demonstrating ideas for introducing a MFL into the primary school. An interesting point, is that MFL is recommended in the document, but never forcibly so. It provides support, practical ideas for activities and describes a primary school case study in order to inspire without coercion. While much of the emphasis of the document is on Key Stage 3 schools, teachers and learners, any reference to PMFL is clearly highlighted.

The document presents how transferable language skills are developed across three languages and it reinforces the importance for teachers to recognise the commonality that exists across the languages. This is vital to communicate to learners to enable them to build on their language skills "…and make connections across their language learning" (p.4). It also recommends that opportunities for communication be afforded to learners across the languages, not only with accuracy, but also "…with confidence, enjoyment and interest in an increasing range of contexts" (p.4). A one-page appendix is attached which provides a summary of the common skills and activities across the curricular documents for languages. This includes, the Programmes of Study for English, Welsh and Welsh second language, the non-statutory framework for MFL and developing communication across the curriculum. As is shown in Figure 4, the document echoes the framework for MFL at Key Stage 2 in so far as it is weighted slightly more towards Oracy, with much less emphasis on Writing.

Figure 3: Key Stage 2 – Skills and language learning across languages (Summary)

Oracy	Reading	Writing
• listen and view attentively/carefully • respond appropriately to different kinds of communication • identify/recognise key points • communicate clearly and confidently • express opinions • adapt talk to audience and purpose • use a variety of sentence structures and vocabulary appropriately • experience and respond to a variety of stimuli and ideas • speak and listen individually, in pairs, in groups • use a variety of methods to present ideas and language, including ICT • present, talk and perform for different people/a variety of audiences • increase confidence in language use by drawing on knowledge of English, Welsh and other languages and appreciate differences and similarities between them.	• develop phonic, grammatical knowledge, word recognition and contextual understanding • develop the ability to read aloud with fluency, accuracy, understanding and enjoyment • read in different ways for different purposes, including: skimming, scanning and detailed reading, predicting, using context and knowledge of language • use a range of appropriate information-retrieval strategies including ICT • retrieve and collate information and ideas from a range of sources • use the knowledge gained from reading to develop their understanding of the structure, vocabulary, grammar and punctuation of language and of how these clarify meaning • read individually and collaboratively • experience and respond to different kinds of texts.	• use a range of sentence structures • use punctuation to clarify meaning, including full stop, exclamation and question marks, comma, apostrophe, bullet points, speech marks • choose and use appropriate vocabulary • develop and use a variety of strategies to enable them to spell correctly • draft and improve their work, using ICT as appropriate • present writing appropriately, developing legible handwriting using appropriate features of layout and presentation, including ICT • write in a variety of forms for different purposes and audiences.

Source: Welsh Government, 2010, p.29

Again, transition is a vital element of this document and links between secondary schools and their feeder primaries are greatly emphasised. This includes some secondary schools delivering the MFL teaching in their feeder primaries, and hosting joint triple literacy events between the schools. It is indirectly evident, that this document makes real, grounded suggestions for schools to develop transition links at a local level that suits their own individual circumstances. Whether a MFL is being taught at primary level or not: "Whether learners have been taught a MFL or not in their primary school, they all arrive in Key Stage 3 with at least two languages and a range of language skills and knowledge" (p.10). Seeking to recommend rather than impose, "Working together within and across settings can support learners' progress in all languages" (p.10). The document clearly endorses that "All secondary language teachers should be aware of what language skills their learners have already acquired" (p.10). Whether this takes the form of a language 'passport'/reporting document that is transferred from school to school or some other form of assessment, this is certainly the type of action that is needed for successful transition and for languages to have a future in the education system at all.

3.7 The Future of Primary MFL Learning in Wales

> Learning other languages is an important element in the education of children and young people. It broadens horizons, introduces learners to other cultures and provides them with the experiences and skills that they need to succeed in the new global economy. (Lewis, Welsh Government, 2015, p.2)

In 2015 Huw Lewis, Minister for Education and Skills in the Welsh Assembly, put forward his vision of language learning and its benefits for learners across the youth spectrum in the aspirational information document '*Global Futures: A Plan to improve and promote MFLs in Wales 2015-2020* (Welsh Government, 2015)'. Three strategic actions were developed and presented in the document:

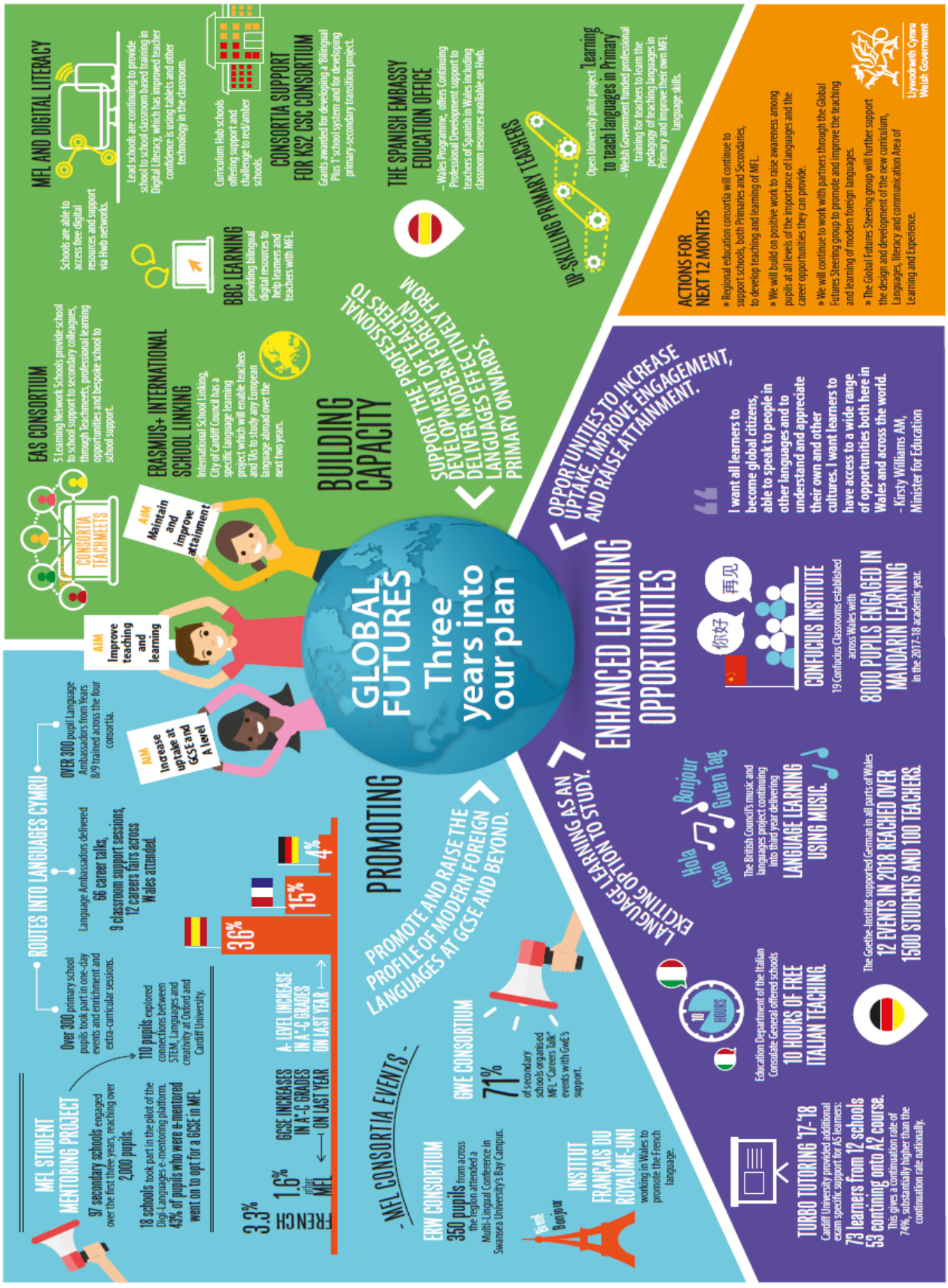
1. Promote and raise the profile of MFLs as an important subject.
2. Build capacity and support for the professional development of the teaching profession to deliver MFLs effectively from year 5 onwards.
3. Provide enhanced learning opportunities to engage and excite learners. (Welsh Government, 2015)

While all actions pertain to primary level, action two seeks to improve capacity and standards of teaching as well as "…establish a sustainable model of support for current and prospective MFL teachers in Wales" (p.9), with a particular emphasis on primary language teachers. In order to implement this strategic action, school centres of excellence would be founded on a regional basis. These centres of excellence would work with a variety of key stakeholders, including language institutes, universities and the British Council in order to provide enhanced professional development for teachers. This would be achieved through provision of high-quality resources, training, digital resources, and development of networking opportunities for language teachers. In addition, arrangements for the key area of primary/secondary transition would be improved and supported. It was envisaged that this strategic action was "…a sustainable and strategic approach" regarding professional development for language teachers, in order to improve the provision of MFL.

Interestingly in 2018, three years into the plan, the Welsh Government produced an infographic to illustrate its progress (see Figure 4). While not presented in any evaluated sense, the infographic does demonstrate considerable progress in three years, and, if ultimately successful, could inform any potential primary ML development in this country, whether this translates into empirical evidence will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Following the release of the Global Futures document, a new draft curriculum for Wales was published: *Draft Curriculum for Wales 2022* (Welsh Government, 2019). The draft curriculum is divided into areas of learning and experience, and the area pertaining to language, '*Languages, Literacy and Communication'* is presented in an 83-page document. The draft curriculum echoes the triple literacy guidelines, advocating that this area of learning and experience "…will provide learners with opportunities both within individual languages and across multiple languages to develop knowledge and skills in listening and reading, speaking and writing, and in literature" (p.5). In this document however, the term 'international languages' is used as opposed to MFL/ML etc. It also takes something of a different direction, not only alluding to the importance language learning has for understanding other cultures but going so far as to state how languages prepare learners to be "citizens of the world" (p.6). Interestingly, it also asserts that "…languages [are] important tools through which we can express our empathy and creativity" (p.5).

Figure 4: Global Futures: Three Years on



Source: Document as produced by the Welsh Assembly Govt, 2018

This sentiment is echoed in the section covering 'What Matters Statements', which are used to articulate "fundamental key concepts that express what matters most in that area of learning and experience, including a headline and a supporting narrative or rationale." (Welsh Government, 2019, p.6) There are four statements, which are interconnected and are sub-divided into progression steps and learning outcomes:

- Learning about identity and culture through languages prepares us to be citizens of Wales and the world.
- Learners who listen and read effectively are prepared to learn throughout their lives.
- Learners who speak and write effectively are prepared to play a full part in life and work.
- Literature fires imagination and inspires creativity. (Welsh Government, 2019 p.6-7)

It is this holistic attitude to the learning of languages, broader than either any of the previous documents, that is astounding and certainly marks an interesting future direction for language learning in Wales, albeit in draft format at present.

3.8 Contrasting the Documents: What can be learned?

While many similarities exist between the two sets of documentation, e.g., the separate documents for curriculum and teacher guidance and the inclusion of sample activities, there remains a considerable number of differences. Ultimately the documents contrast greatly, both in their content and usability as PGL. To identify key information to be included (and potentially excluded) in any future Irish PMFL prescriptive grey literature, this section will review the parallels and differences between the sets of materials.

The messages conveyed in both sets of documents show some clear comparisons. Both the Welsh and the Irish curricular documents espouse the benefits of learning a MFL, and the use of active learning methodologies. They also endorse the importance of cross-curricular integration and establishing links between L1, L2 and the MFL, which clearly is supported by the literature as being good practice (e.g., Martin, 2000). The framework, for example, endorses the complimentary links between learning the MFL and the skills acquired through the learning of English and Welsh, confirming that the learning of an MFL enhances the primary curriculum, "The

framework reflects the skills for English and Welsh and supports oracy and literacy across the curriculum as well as language learning skills" (p.129) "…providing a valuable and enjoyable cultural experience for all pupils" (p.26). It also echoes the message of the NCCA document of the importance of having a "positive early experience" of MFL learning, through enjoyable and effective classroom activities. These messages echo the effects of plurilingualism as advocated by an increasing bank of researchers, such as Chabert (2019) who asserts that "teaching all languages as part of a communication system would develop strategic competences that would facilitate learning in any language" (p.571).

In relation to plurilingualism, a significant commonality between the two sets of curricular documents, and arguably, a considerable deficiency, is the absence of any mention of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). This is used as language guidelines both in Europe and around the world (Nakatani 2012). Moreover, it is worth noting that over the past few years, an evolution of the CEFR has been taking place, acknowledging the plurilingual nature of some education systems, e.g., Wales and Ireland, in which the learner's resources in one language or variety may be different in nature to those in another (Council of Europe 2018). Any future documents should consider reference to the CEFR if it is going to be used in the planning of the subject.

However, the two sets of documents differ in a variety of ways, for example the 'flexibility', or lack thereof, in the Welsh documents regarding which class level to teach the ML, and the absence of a given time allocation for the subject. The Irish documents clearly recommend 90 minutes per week and the language would be implemented with 5th and 6th classes only. While arguably impracticable (MLPSI, 2012), giving specific advice in the Irish documents was something to be commended and would be pivotal in any future documents, in catering for the broad profile of teachers involved. In addition, regarding their support in relation to approaches and methodologies, the Irish guidelines present a variety of sample lessons across four languages, in an accessible written format. The Welsh guidance document presents sample lessons and activities in best practice clips on a DVD, which is not now available. It could be argued that a mix of planned lessons presented in digital format alongside the actual lesson video recording would be a practical and effective combination for teachers, both from a personal improvement and

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) point of view. Taking this step would help to cater for the learning styles of the teachers and scaffold educators through the introduction and implementation of the primary MFL outside of the 'face to face' CPD.

Interestingly, while some nebulous aspects exist in the Welsh documents, rather than overly prescriptive, its recommendations and guidance for the development of triple literacy across Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, are certainly worthy of inclusion in any future Irish documents, in view of the Primary Languages Curriculum (NCCA, 2019), albeit without any reference to primary MFLs. This 'Venn diagram' strategy of demonstrating how language learning skills develop across languages and progress through the key stages is one that informs and guides, rather than dictates and prescribes, which can be an interesting tactic for getting teachers on board.

On analysing the four documents in their totality, what is striking, is the way in which the Irish documents could be argued to be relatively 'ahead of their time.' Despite the relatively newer Welsh documents, elements of both the Irish draft curriculum and guidelines, compare favourably with their Celtic counterparts and even more current literature on the topic (e.g., Courtney, 2017). This could suggest that while research that informed the Welsh documents may have been more up to date, the content of the Irish documents convey similar ideas and direction. Cultural competence and language awareness in both the curriculum and framework, as advocated by a plethora of studies (Byram, 1997; Bialystok and Barac, 2012; Obilişteanu and Niculescu, 2018), the development of communicative competence (Harris, 1991), and the fostering of positive attitudes to language learning (Maynard, 2012), illustrates concrete comparisons between the documents. However, such direction could be argued as being merely theoretical. Realistically, it may not be as practicable, or effective as initially anticipated. How this has been implemented 'at the coalface' will be especially important to find out. The review of the empirical literature that follows will present elements of evaluation of both sets of PGL which should provide some thought-provoking insights.

3.9 Conclusion

Although this chapter endeavoured to present a review of the PGL in such a way as to demonstrate clear similarities and differences, the fundamental contrast lies in the current situation with regards to PMFL in both jurisdictions. While some noteworthy details were

identified in both sets of documentation, especially regarding transition in the Welsh documents, and the more explicit curricular aims of the Irish equivalents, both countries have differing, if vaguely similar, plans. A mere three years after the abolition of the MLPSI in Ireland, a reasonably clear and identified vision for primary MFLs was devised and presented in the Welsh *Global Futures* (2015) document. It predicted that pupils would become "…Bilingual plus 1…" combining the language learning of "English, Welsh and at least one MFL from primary to examination level" (p.3).

The new 2019 draft *Curriculum for Wales (2022)*, affirmed the vision of integrating languages, and the broadly holistic range of skills that can be attained through language learning. A more nebulous proposal had been published earlier in the Irish *Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026* (2017), with any potential development in the area of PMFL dependent on a NCCA curriculum review. As already noted, the review produced a consultation Draft Primary Curriculum Framework document (NCCA, 2020) with a much more tangible role being suggested for MFLs in the last four years in primary school. It could certainly be argued that the curriculum framework is an aspirational document:

> The curriculum aims to provide a strong foundation for every child to thrive and flourish, supporting them in realising their full potential as individuals and as members of communities and society during childhood and into the future. (NCCA, 2020, p.5)

The framework document has been considerably informed by research: a diverse mix of primary, pre- and post-primary schools, and various education partners. The framework presents the curricular areas as seven, key, linked competencies that exist from the beginning of primary education (junior infants) through to the final year (sixth class). These competencies ultimately aim to equip children with the "essential knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values which enable them to adapt and deal with a range of situations, challenges and contexts in support of broader learning goals." (NCCA, 2020, p.7). What is noteworthy, is that one of the competencies is called "Communicating and Using Language" (p.7) and features "English, Irish and other languages." (p.7). While alluded to early in the framework document, the key proposal, however explicitly "supports the introduction of MFLs in stages 3 [3rd and 4th class] and 4 [5th and 6th class]. It incrementally builds on children's existing knowledge and awareness of language and progresses to a competency model in stage 4." (p.13). This advancement could arguably be one

of the most revolutionary changes to primary education in Ireland for decades. Whether it becomes part of the curriculum, however, remains to be seen. Specificity will be key nonetheless, with a clearly outlined programme of study and explicit guidance and direction for its implementation, allowing for the many permutations of classroom situations.

Keeping all these official developments in mind, the next chapter, which is essentially the second part of the literature review, will focus on empirical research and will reference research conducted in both the Welsh and Irish contexts. Assessing if the Welsh vision has been successful on the ground so far should be thought-provoking, informative, and could have implications for the Irish perspective.

CHAPTER 4: MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A REVIEW OF THE EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

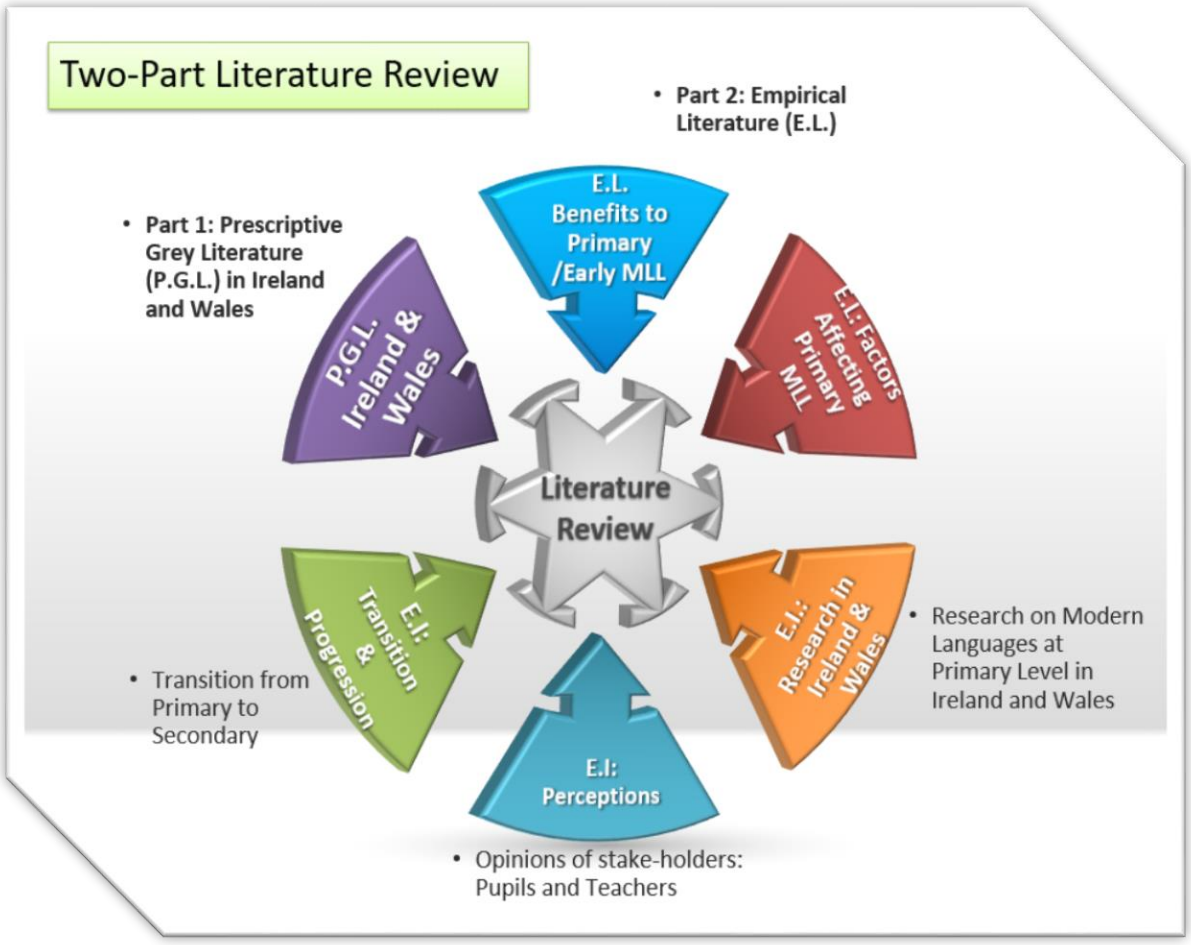
"A man who reviews the old so as to find out the new is qualified to teach others."

– Confucius (Analects 2, v11)

4.1 Introduction

The literature review for this research is both systematic and narrative in nature and divided into two distinct chapters that focus on (i) PGL and (ii) empirical literature. The reason for this is in order to best analyse and evaluate the most pertinent documentation and empirical evidence that will contribute to the overall study, echoing Jolley's assertion that research is, at its core, "a cumulative endeavour" (Jolley, 2013 p.32). Using such an approach means that the previous chapter is a preamble to the empirical literature, demonstrating the two sides of a coin that will ultimately derive a more considered and veracious review of the documentation.

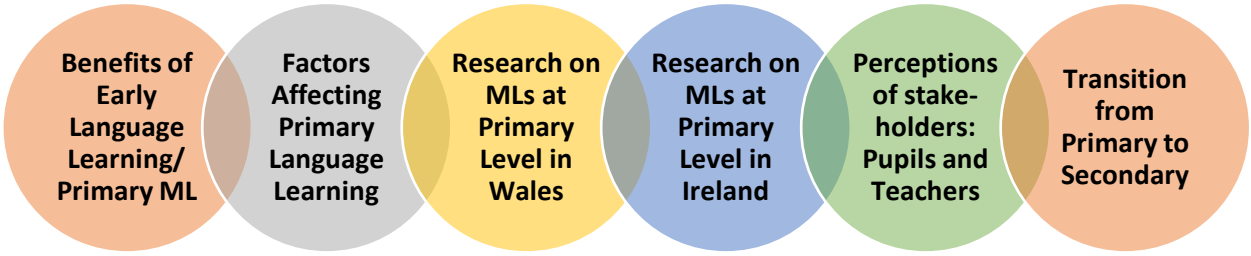
Figure 5: Literature Review Layout



Primarily, a review of the empirical literature will contextualise the research undertaken, and validate, through analysis of a wide variety of supporting studies, the thinking behind this research. On reviewing the research and articles on the topic of PMFL, the review of the empirical literature has been divided into five distinct sections, as presented in Figure 5 (above). The review endeavours to be thorough, objective and critical, to add to its validity. It is important to note that, in order to add to the rigour of the research undertaken, this review was not undertaken in the months during data gathering or throughout the coding process. This ensured that the data and codes were uppermost in the researcher's mind and were not dictated by the findings of previous literature reviewed for previous assignments.

While taking the time to systematically and iteratively review each article, commonalities became apparent, turning each article into something of a jigsaw piece, each with its own unique piece of the bigger picture. However, it would have been inefficient, ineffective and unwieldy if each piece of the jigsaw were given its own section of the review. A further analysis was conducted in order to efficaciously categorise the articles, which ultimately resulted in six over-arching themes for review in this chapter (see Figure 6). Firstly, an initial presentation and review of a broad range of international research on the benefits of primary MFLs, will provide a *milieu* for the research to be undertaken, and link directly to Chapter 1. This will subsequently be followed by a review of literature pertaining to factors involved in PMFLs. A critical evaluation of Irish research in this area, which will include the two-part evaluation of the initial Pilot Project and subsequent MLPSI will be preceded by empirical studies from the comparative jurisdiction, which should demonstrate success in implementation (or lack thereof) from the PGL discussed in Chapter 3. Research gathered relating to perceptions of key stakeholders (Pupils and Teachers) will then be discussed, in addition to the significant issue of Primary/Secondary Transition.

Figure 6 Themes of the Review



4.2 What are the benefits of Early MFL Learning?

As reported in Chapter 1, there is extensive evidence advocating the broad benefits of learning a language across the age-ranges and this section will present and analyse literature relating to early MFL learning specifically. Despite the various studies that suggest the merits of early language learning, whether in naturalistic settings (Singleton, 1989) or educational settings (Sharpe and Driscoll, 2000; Murphy et al., 2015), there is also antithetical research questioning the general findings (Myles, 2017). Before analysing any perceived or empirical benefits of early MFL learning, it is important to present and discuss the Critical Period Hypothesis theory and how it relates to early language learning.

4.2.1 The Age Factor and the Critical Period Hypothesis

The theory and belief that an age factor exists in relation to language learning has long caused fervent debates. Despite the various studies that suggest the merits of early language learning, whether in naturalistic settings (Singleton, 1989) or educational settings (Sharpe and Driscoll, 2000; Murphy et al., 2015), there is also antithetical research questioning the general findings, especially regarding what has been referred to as the age factor or critical period hypothesis (CPH) (Myles, 2017; Munoz, 2006). A theory championed by researchers over many decades from Tomb (1925) and Penfield and Roberts (1959) to Lenneberg (1967), supports the central tenet of the CPH, that a limited time period exists for effective language learners, outside of which, language development is more constrained for the learner. This in essence claims, that younger learners acquire a language quicker than their older counterparts. Penfield and Roberts explain that this is a physiological process which pertains to the plasticity of the brain, which, they assert, "becomes increasingly stiff and rigid by the age of nine" (p.236). However, there has been, as Singleton (1995) states, "…a certain amount of intra-researcher variation" (p.2), on the issue in the intervening years, especially with regard to second language acquisition, with researchers such as Morford and Mayberry (2000) supporting the CPH, while others, such as Ekstrand (1976), finding that learning a second language "improves with age" (p.130). However, Singleton and Pfenniger (2018) make a more forthright assertion that the CPH question has been answered by researchers and linguists "with a cavalier disregard for the detail of the relevant facts" (p.254). A critical point to note, especially given Eric Lenneberg's popularisation of the CPH, is that Lenneberg's hypothesis of CPH was, as Singleton postulates, "based partly on folk wisdom"

(Singleton, 2001, p.77) and referred, firstly, to the acquisition of a *first* language, and not necessarily to a second language, and secondly, to an age range from 2 years old to puberty. This was strongly opposed by Singleton and Ryan (2004) who, in addition to citing a variety of disproving studies, postulate that no point exists "in the infant's development when language is not in the process of being acquired" (Singleton and Ryan, 2004, p.34).

On reviewing the literature in relation to the existence of a CPH therefore, a binary argument became increasingly apparent: the empirical evidence, or the theorists involved, either advocated or repudiated the CPH hypothesis, with a majority of the more recent empirical evidence supporting the latter. Hakuta (2001), for example, questions the evidence on the existence of the CPH in second language acquisition, asserting that "there is no empirically definable end point" and that the evidence demonstrates that "there are no qualitative differences between child and adult learners and there are large environmental effects on the outcomes" (Hakuta, 2001, p.11-12). Huang (2015) also disagrees fundamentally with the CPH, going so far as to assert that there is little empirical backing for early MFL learning. Jaekel, Schurig, Florian, and Ritter (2017) also query the positivity that is assigned to the age factor and CPH, asserting that "…despite the common belief that younger learners are better language learners, research has consistently shown that older learners make faster progress in classroom language learning" (p.19). Snow (1983) comes to a similar conclusion when comparing adults and children as second language learners of Dutch in the Netherlands. Testing 52 participants across an age range of three and a half years old to fifty-five years old, Snow found that older learners of second languages are superior to their younger counterparts. An interesting point to note however, is that this linguistic superiority was considerably diminished when comparing adults with teenage language learners. Snow attributes this to the teenagers' increased naturalistic exposure to the language through a combination of communication with teachers in school and friendships with Dutch natives.

Changing the base age comparisons slightly, Jaekel et al.'s research explored how the starting age for language learning (6-7 year-olds, versus 8-9 year-olds), and the amount of language instruction received, can affect language learning achievement. When investigating 5130 primary-school pupils learning English in Germany, the progress made by each group of pupils

was tracked, through testing, over a two year period and children's proficiency in listening and reading were measured. The study found that the two-year head-start was closed by the late starters by the age of 12-13. It is important to note that the research focused solely on reading and listening, and not, crucially, on speaking and writing. This omission and the consideration that motivation, also, was not monitored, plus the fact that 8-9 year-olds, as pre-pubescent children, could still be considered early language learners, are key limitations of the study.

For the proponents of the CPH, much of the empirical evidence, as Singleton and Pfenniger (2018) point out, "has its origin mostly in studies on immigrants' language development" (p.258). This point is evidenced in various empirical studies such as Piske et al (2002). In addition, Johnson and Newport (1989) conducted an interesting study on immigrants' language development with the intention of applying Lenneberg's hypothesis to second language acquisition. The research focused on 46 native Chinese or Korean speakers who arrived in the United States of America and who learned English as a second language. The participants varied in age from 3 to 39 years old (Johnson and Newport, 1989). What Johnson and Newport found was that participants who arrived in the USA before the age of seven reached native performance in their testing, while after the age of seven (through to puberty), there was a distinct decline in performance, thus affirming Lenneberg's CPH. Over a decade later, however, Birdsong and Molis (2001) conducted a study in order to disprove Johnson and Newport's findings. Conducting the study in an almost identical way to Johnson and Newport, Birdsong and Molis instead used Spanish speaking immigrants as participants, they found that even post-pubescent arrivals to the USA developed native-like proficiency in the English language, thereby controverting evidence regarding the existence of the CPH.

While not explicitly acquiring empirical evidence on the existence of the CPH, investigating the effects of starting ages on the development of linguistic (MFL) competence, was the focus of Myles and Mitchell's (2012) study of 73 pupils in three distinct classes (aged 5-6, 7-8 and 11-12). Making every effort to keep the reliability and validity of every aspect of the study, a specialist visiting teacher gave lessons for two hours a week over 19 weeks (38 hours), all of which were recorded and transcribed, and all focused mostly on oral language. The pupils had no previous experience of the MFL (which, importantly, was assessed before the study). The teaching and

programme of teaching were as similar as possible across all three age groups. Pupils were assessed in the middle and end of the project, and two months after the project's conclusion. Once again, to maintain reliability, the pupils' L1 literacy scores were recorded and their working memory assessed, with focus groups and interviews also taking place. The research provided some noteworthy findings between older and younger pupils. Regarding receptive vocabulary, little difference was found between age groups, however the older pupils did better with MFL grammar (presumably because of their L1 literacy development). Furthermore, higher L1 literacy scores and working memory, supported MFL language learning, and while a broader use of cognitive strategies was used by older learners to learn the MFL, the younger pupils demonstrated significant enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation for MFL learning. In terms of the limitations of the study, despite the significant use of data collection instruments, pupils' attitudes were only measured with the two younger groups. Additionally, only 14 out of 18 of the older learner group completed all the assessments.

While there is a lack of genuine consensus among experts regarding the 'Age Factor' or CPH and the process of language learning/acquisition (Sharpe and Driscoll, 2000), it is asserted that early second language learning in a formal setting can have broader results outside of the CPH. This point is evidenced for example, as Gürsoy (2011) found, "an early start for learning foreign languages is a facilitative process for children to understand differences and develop a multicultural viewpoint" (p.761). The more wide-ranging effects of early language learning at primary level will be discussed and expanded in the next section.

4.2.2 Language Learning in the Primary School

Across the world, researchers have been investigating MFL learning at primary level and its effects on a variety of factors. Several research studies, for example, in the United States and Canada (e.g., Caccavale, 2007; Wilburn Robinson, 1998), have been conducted on the topic of MFL teaching and learning, many of which have identified important advantages with early language learning, especially in respect of progress in literacy and numeracy. Caccavale (2007) conducted a review of the literature on the correlation between early MFL learning and improved skills in the pupils' L1. In her review, she found that in general assessments, primary school pupils that studied a language, significantly outperformed students that had not done so. These findings echoed those of Garcia's (2001) study. Caccavale does make the important point that MFL

learning, should be a continuous programme within the curriculum in order to have these benefits. Other notable studies in North America found evidence that primary language learning correlates with enhanced assessment results in other curricular areas, with notable achievement in literacy and numeracy (Stewart, 2005, Wilburn Robinson, 1998).

Yelland, Pollard, and Mercuri (1993) carried out noteworthy research showing the effects that even minimal exposure to the MFL can have on the pupils' L1. The study focused on two groups of preparatory grade and Grade 1 pupils (5 to 7 years-olds), with one group of monolingual pupils and the other group termed "marginal bilingual (p.423)", in other words taught a language for a minimum time per week. The main research instrument used was an assessment of the development of word awareness, during the pupils' first two years of primary school. The authors argue that such timing was selected due to the pupils' development of reading acquisition skills during that time. From their assessments, the study presented that pupils from the preparatory grade of school, that had been taught Italian for 1 hour per week for several months, displayed significantly higher scores in a variety of literacy assessments in English. However, there are some caveats to note in this research. Firstly, it could be argued that the use of phonological awareness could have been more appropriate than word awareness as an assessment tool during that period of schooling. Additionally, in the final assessment of the Grade 1, the initial gap that was demonstrated by the language learners had been closed and both groups were performing equally.

There is certainly an expanding school of thought (as well as evidence) that has found the development of metalinguistic skills is a significant benefit of early language learning (Kirsch, 2012; White and Horst, 2012; Fernandez, 2007). Such findings are demonstrated, as Fernandez asserts, through broadening "children's experience of language generally" (p.3). In the findings from their own research, Murphy, Macaro, Alba, and Cipolla (2015), also affirm this belief that the introduction of a MFL improves the child's first language, empowering and enabling them to look systematically at language and the language learning process. Their study took place with three groups of native English-speaking primary pupils (aged 7-9). One group learnt French, one Italian and one group acted as a control, not learning any language. They were tested on their English reading and spelling skills, both before and after the study, and the pupils were withdrawn

from class to learn the language. While they found that the language-learning pupils showed advantages (especially the Italian learners) over their monolingual peers, it must be remembered that the pupils were withdrawn for the language lessons, which would not necessarily occur in real-life primary classrooms and the language learning period was only 15 weeks. As a result, it could not necessarily be described as a generalizable study.

Tinsley and Board (2015) conducted their Language Trends Survey in England and focused primarily on the initial impact of the compulsory status for languages in Key Stage 2 which had been introduced by the government in September 2014. Out of a random sample of 3000 primary schools from across the country, 648 participated and completed the online survey, which produced a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. The survey found in the qualitative data, even more interesting advantages from both a cognitive and sociolinguistic perspective. Findings highlighted improved communication and linguistic skills as well as improvements in the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs. An interesting point to note with this survey is that, because primary schools had taken part in the 2012 version, there was no comparative data available to the authors, which further legitimised their findings.

When introducing a PMFL, Mitchell, Corley, and Garnham (1992) make the important point however, that in order to maximise the benefits of early language learning in primary school, every aspect of the implementation of the primary language needs to be planned and implemented in an effective manner. Such a point is extremely pertinent and would certainly need to be kept in mind for any potential introduction of a PMFL, regardless of the factors that would be involved and the jurisdiction in which it would be proposed.

4.2.3 Further Issues with Early Language Learning

Further points that may not be as prevalent in the literature as others, relate to pupils with special educational needs (SEN), or additional support needs (ASN). Several researchers have investigated the potential of SEN/ASN pupils learning a MFL, with many advocating the benefits (Van Wengen, 2013; Wire, 2005; Marsh, 2005). In Marsh's broad research, investigations were conducted on the teaching of MFLs across Europe. Marsh looked at pupils with a variety of needs and made significant findings. For example, pupils with specific learning difficulties, who, according to Marsh, "…can both enjoy learning a language and progress linguistically, socially and

culturally" (p.20). In addition, he found that in relation to pupils with social, emotional and behavioural disorders, "…there is a strong link between learning foreign languages and 'the positive impact this has on the pupils' social skills and sensitivity towards others" (p.21). Moreover, children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, children of colour and English as an Additional Language Learners, according to Curtain and Dahlberg (2004), make the most significant proportionate progress from early MFL study. This is proposed to be because the MFL is less dependent on previous learning than most of the primary school curriculum, allowing pupils to succeed who may have experienced ongoing academic failure. This is an interesting point, but its assertion leaves it open to the counterargument; that an even earlier introduction of a primary MFL may negate this finding, leaving the language learning experience in the 'academic failure' category of subject for these pupils.

Despite the contradictory findings regarding the extent of the benefits to early MFL learning, what is clear, is that there are certainly advantages to learning a MFL at an early age, whether from an academic, cultural, attitudinal or metalinguistic point of view (Kearney and Ahn, 2014; Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović, 2011). However, in order to properly and effectively implement a MFL at an early stage, there are considerable factors and challenges which will be important to investigate and, as Mitchell et al. (1992) stress, significant planning for effective implementation must take place.

4.3 Factors Affecting Primary Language Learning

Research has shown over many years, that there are a variety of factors that can affect language learning at primary level (Slaughter, Smith and Hajek, 2019; Graham, Courtney, Marinis, and Tonkyn, 2017; Jones, Barnes & Hunt, 2007; Hood, 2006). Across the research, there is an apparent consensus regarding the existence of a broad spectrum of issues that can determine the successful development of a primary MFL (see Figure 7). Johnstone (2003, cited in Hunt et al. 2005), alludes to the fact that to effectively progress in learning a language, three core groups of factors should be taken into account. These factors become overarching groupings, including several significant variables:

- Social Factors (e.g., the exposure to the language learning)
- Process Factors (e.g., the teaching and learning experiences)

- Individual/Group Factors (e.g., motivation, self-efficacy, and proficiency of both teachers and pupils)

Investigating the studies on the topic of primary MFLs, illustrates how these groupings emerge. A variety of factors become repeatedly evident in findings such as:

- Motivation (both teacher and learner) (Djigunovic, 1995; Myles and Mitchell, 2012)
- Self-efficacy (again, both teacher and learner) (Pattison, 2014; Waddington, 2019)
- Teacher training (both initial teacher education (ITE)) (Cajkler and Hall, 2012)
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD)) (Burch and Vare, 2019)
- Teaching methodologies (Bouffard and Sarkar, 2008; Macrory, Chrétien and Ortega-Martin, 2012; Driscoll, Earl and Cable, 2013)
- The skills and language proficiency of teachers (Woodgate-Jones, 2008; Graham et al., 2017)
- Resourcing (Kaplan and Baldauf, 2003).

In fact, Holmes and Myles (2019) assert it succinctly in their own findings:

> The principal problems in schools relate to time allocation, teacher subject knowledge and language proficiency, limited access to professional development and a lack of a shared and agreed understanding of pupil progress at the point of transfer from primary to secondary schools. Given the central importance of subject knowledge to good teaching, the variability of initial teacher training in subject knowledge development is a cause of concern. (p.9)

Nevertheless, the relative importance of each factor in terms of a hierarchical positioning remains unclear, despite all contributing to the potential success of a primary MFL, or indeed, lack thereof. This section of the review will investigate and discuss these issues, including the challenges that the literature identifies, but will not necessarily classify them in any specific hierarchical order. At this point, it is also worth noting, that some variables such as self-efficacy and attitudes/motivation may overlap with other sections of this chapter, for example, transition, or the perceptions of teachers and pupils.

Figure 7: Factors Affecting the Potential Implementation of a Primary Modern Language

4.3.1 Motivation and MFL Learning

Motivation is both intrinsic and extrinsic (Bénabou and Tirole, 2003). Bénabou and Tirole, (2003) describe extrinsic motivation as motivation which is contingent on getting a reward, while intrinsic motivation focuses on the "individual's desire to perform the task for its own sake" (p.490). How motivation affects pupils' language learning has been the subject of several studies and is a fundamental factor in how and why a learner will learn a language. However, it must be acknowledged that it is a wide-ranging topic which moves beyond the subject of this research. Therefore, a more specific focus will be assigned to motivation in a primary educational context. Djigunovic's (1995) study of primary language learning in Croatia, identified the progression of the pupils from associatively/extrinsically motivated, through 'fun' activities and tasks, to being more intrinsically motivated after three years of language learning, and identifying themselves as language learners. Interestingly, daily language lessons were conducted by teachers with high levels of language proficiency. Nikolov's (1999) study of Hungarian pupils' motivation saw that pupils were more motivated by the classroom practice. However, there are some researchers and theorists that suggest that motivating pupils during a sustained primary MFL programme may prove difficult, especially as they grow older (e.g., Clark and Trafford, 1996). Sung and Padilla (1998), somewhat concur with the assumption that the younger the learner, the higher the motivation levels for language learning.

Researchers are not unanimous however, in the assertion that early L2 starters are more motivated in the long run than later L2 learners. Pfenniger and Singleton (2019), for example, found in their extensive research review that "the popular assumption that primary school L2 learners are generally more motivated than older learners, is not borne out by research" (p.118). Reviewing literature across four key factors relating to an early start of MFL instruction, their study of literature pertaining to motivation found that positive motivation was more inclined to be associated with pupils at the end of their primary schooling rather than younger learners. The reasoning suggested that older students may be motivated to attain language proficiency quickly.

Lanvers (2017) also conducted a review of the literature relating to motivation, narrowing the focus to studies relating to younger language learners in the United Kingdom. What Lanvers found, varied among three specific learner groupings. Among primary school pupils (aged 7-11), She found that pupils demonstrated high levels of intrinsic motivation through enjoyment of language learning itself, rather than because they 'must' learn the language. Secondary level students (aged 11-16) contrasted sharply, showing low levels of motivation, with their feelings surrounding MFL learning being determined by teacher and parental expectations. A significant change occurred in university students (aged 18+), who demonstrated high motivation with a view to developing proficiency.

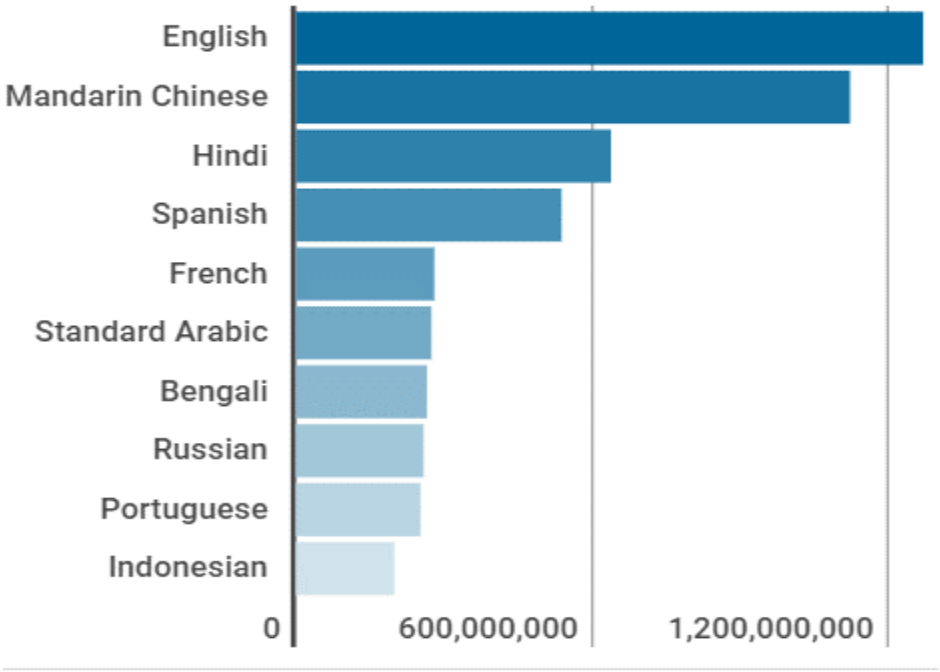
Looking specifically at primary pupils, however, Martin (2012), found high motivation among pupils towards, MFL learning at primary level (aged 7 to 11). In a reasonably comprehensive study of 319 pupils across 41 primary schools, Martin investigated pupils' experiences of a pilot MFL learning project known as 'Pathfinder'. The research itself involved a multitude of research instruments, including lesson observation, interviews with stakeholders (staff and pupils), as well as examinations of various school documents, for example, school inspection reports. Findings indicated that pupils were highly motivated, with considerable enthusiasm for language learning based on a variety of reasons, including developed communication skills, enhanced L1 skills, and improved self-confidence. Martin also notes that "the motivational influence of the learning environment should not be underestimated, since the immediate classroom setting produces a direct effect on the L2 learning process" (p. 349). This point links to Martin's finding that most pupils interviewed, showed strong affiliative motivation, implying that they held their teachers

in high regard and indeed “wanted to please them” (p.350). Despite the various research instruments used in the study, it may have been worthwhile to incorporate a pupil survey/questionnaire or perhaps use a focus group(s) with pupils to get more nuanced and richer data. In addition, a key point of the finding, was the lack of reference to the specific language(s) taught within the Pathfinder project, or how that choice may have affected pupil motivation.

4.3.2 Which Language(s) to Teach?

If a decision is taken at a systemic, policy level, to include a MFL in the primary system, one of the core questions is “which language (s) to teach?” It is important to note that while this section will not be conducting a ‘deep-dive’ review into the debate of which languages to teach, it acknowledges and presents the debate itself as a factor that will influence PMFLs. Over the years, a considerable number of opinions has been conveyed, attempting to develop a conventional wisdom about which language(s) should be taught in a school system (Jones and Coffey, 2006), especially given that English is essentially the lingua franca of many sectors (Pachler, 2007). However, much of this ‘wisdom’ does not come from empirical research, of which there is a significant paucity. Most ideas, according to Jones and Coffey (2006) are “based on an idea of maximising ‘usefulness’ of a given language” (p.8). Selecting a language based on such a utilitarian value is something that can be linked to the previous section on attitudes and motivation. A language could be selected based on the number of speakers around the world (see Figure 11). If this is to be the primary consideration, it is clear from Figure 7, that the three most spoken languages, outside of English, are Mandarin (1120 million), Hindi (637 million), and Spanish (538 million).

Figure 8: Top 10 Most Spoken Languages, 2020



Source: Ethnologue (2020) (https://www.ethnologue.com/guides/ethnologue200)

However, another utilitarian viewpoint could be taken, as put forward by Midgley (2017). He surmised that "If the focus of language learning is to improve business prospects, then one strategy would to be to select those that are spoken in the fastest-growing emerging economies in the world," which, according to Midgley, are India, Indonesia and Malaysia. Alternatively, Midgely suggests that the number of countries in which a language is spoken could influence the appropriate choice of teaching language, with Arabic (57), French (53) and Spanish (31) as the languages used in the most countries outside of English. Pachler (2007) also makes a key point regarding language choice:

> An important issue in terms of language provision and choice relates to the difficulty in predicting future need in relation to foreign language skills: it is next to impossible to foresee which language a young person will need at what level and for what purpose in their later life. Again, what are the implications for choice? (p. 8)

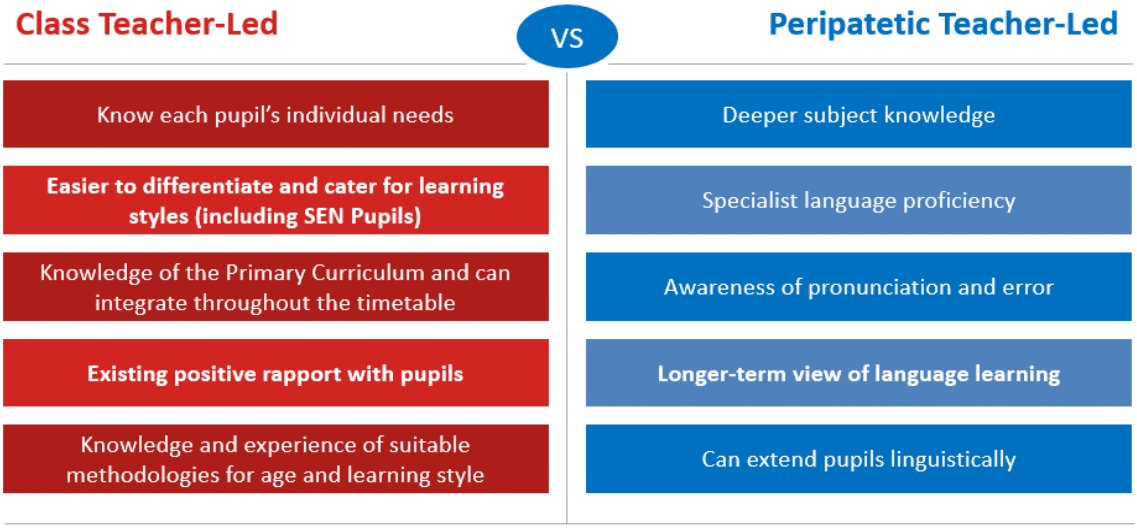
Such assertions could be argued as reasonable, but, ultimately, perhaps, extremely difficult to implement, both from a practical as well as a practicable perspective. The choice of language(s), while being a complex question, could simply be determined by, as Maynard (2012) posits, "the skills base within the school and/or availability of specialist staff and, perhaps, native speakers"

(p. 118). Maynard's point could be why in the most recent Language Trends Survey (Collen, 2020), it emerged that 75% of primary schools in England teach French.

4.3.4 Delivery Model: Who to teach the language?

In terms of a delivery model for primary MFLs, much of the research conducted has shown a lack of consensus as to who should teach the MFL at primary level? Using various methods, such as data review and analysis (MLPSI, 2012), an evaluation review of the Key Stage 2 MFLs pilot project (Arad Consulting, 2010) and reviews of national and international contexts (Hunt, Barnes, Powell, Lindsay and Mujis, 2005), studies have overlapped in their identification of the various categories of teacher that have taught the language in different contexts. These have included primary-led teachers (including the class teacher, or another specialist teacher on staff), secondary-led, where a secondary teacher from a local feeder school comes and teaches the language, and the third is a peripatetic teacher who is a specialist in the language. However, these can be arguably rationalised into a more binary debate of two models: Class Teacher and Peripatetic Teacher (including specialist staff teachers and/or secondary level teachers). There are certainly advantages to both categories of teachers to be used (see Figure 8) and some studies (Arad Consulting, 2010), have found both to be potentially sustainable, as will be described in more detail later in this review.

Figure 9: Language Teacher Profile Comparison



The discussion broadens beyond the simple skillset of each category, and research conducted by both Martin (2000) and Murray (2017) affirms my categorisations of teachers, in terms of social

order within a school. There are differing types of research. Martin's (2000) article examined the various approaches to primary MFL teaching, while Murray's (2017) article considered the perceptions of Scottish primary teachers in relation to the benefits and challenges of the 1+2 language policy as implemented by the Scottish Government. The teachers' opinions were gathered through a combination of online questionnaires (n=243) and semi-structured interviews of five staff from the same large primary school in Scotland. Both researchers found that peripatetic teachers found it difficult to establish themselves in the classroom, finding order and control difficult to maintain among pupils. Martin argued that *anyone* other than the class teacher is believed to be an outsider by the pupils and this can ultimately affect language progress.

This issue of classroom management from the outsider, the peripatetic teachers' perspective was also found in research conducted by Driscoll in 1999. Driscoll examined the comparisons between the specialist and generalist teachers in her ethnographic study of the two models in two separate local education authority areas (LEAs) in England. In the study she explored a model of a specialist, peripatetic teacher employed in several schools, and explored the primary (generalist) model where the class teacher also teaches the language. She found that there were distinct advantages attributable to each individual teaching model, with the specialist having the linguistic proficiency, cultural knowledge and confidence, but lacking the classroom and relationships management of the classroom teacher. She did, however, clarify that in situations where the class teacher remained in the room during the language class with the peripatetic teacher "pupils were notably more co-operative, and incidences of rudeness or ridicule…minimal" (p.45). This is interesting and would demonstrate to the pupils the liaisons between the two teachers and establish a cooperative culture within the language classroom from the beginning.

Driscoll asserts that the generalist is able to integrate the language learning across the school day, however without sufficient linguistic knowledge or intercultural awareness, the need for "high-quality relevant materials" (p.47) is vital. Interestingly, Driscoll does not advocate one model over the other *per se*, rather she suggests that, in addition to exploring teaching models that use the expertise of the peripatetic, specialist teachers, there is a need "to approach those

generalist teachers who are prepared to incorporate foreign languages into their repertoire as experts in their own right" (p.48). This is potentially, what can be conducted in the Irish context.

4.3.5 Language Proficiency

Other studies have investigated the issues surrounding the teachers' language proficiency and the teaching methodologies used in the language classroom (Legg, 2013; Barton, 2009). Regarding teachers' language proficiency, many researchers identify linguistic proficiency as vitally important in order to successfully introduce and implement the primary MFL (Grenfell, 2002). However, using similar methods, a combination of questionnaires and teacher interviews, Murray (2017) and Legg (2013) found it to be the most important challenge among participants in their studies, with many of the teachers conveying their lack of confidence and competence in teaching the MFL.

Unsworth, Persson, Prins, and De Bot (2015) conducted a noteworthy study in the Netherlands, investigating the impact of teachers' language proficiency, combined with the time allocated to the MFL, early in the participants' education. 187 English-learning participants took part, aged 4 at the beginning of the study, with 26 further learner participants not learning the language. In the research, teaching participants' proficiency ranged from A1 (beginner) to C2 (mastery) on the CEFR. Some teachers were native speakers (some of whom co-taught language lessons with lower-proficiency teachers). The learner participants were given between 40 and 225 minutes of English learning per week and were tested using two standardised tests of English at the end of year one and two. Unsurprisingly, pupils who had been learning the language did much better in the language tests than those who had not learned the language. Additionally, it was found that pupils exposed to 60 minutes (or more) per week of English did much better on the language tasks than those exposed to less than 60 minutes per week. Strikingly, but arguably predictably, the teachers' language proficiency was the most important factor for pupils' language learning. The higher the language proficiency, the higher the learners' scoring on language tasks. Interestingly, in the vocabulary test, there was no difference between the language learners and the non-language learners. This finding could be related to learners' metalinguistic awareness; recognising some English words in the test through their L1 Dutch knowledge or potential English knowledge from outside of school. Whether this could transfer to other contexts is potentially questionable and is a key limitation of the study. Despite this finding, the authors asserted that

outside exposure to the English language had no major influence on the learners' performance in the study. Moreover, the language testing focused on only two elements of language: receptive grammar and receptive vocabulary. A broader range of testing would have potentially provided more nuanced and rigorous findings. Another limitation centres around the co-teaching and the potential compensatory effects that native speakers would have on the lower proficiency of their colleagues. This specific point would need to be researched separately.

A counterargument to this last point, however, is put forward by Long (1990), suggesting that there are flaws in the general assumption that 'being good at the language' is sufficient for primary language learning, whereas high levels of proficiency and methodology combine for effective language teaching. Nevertheless, arguably, higher levels of language proficiency can yield rewards, such as the potential implementation of a CLIL methodology in the classroom.

4.3.6 Teaching Considerations

A variety of teaching approaches have been advocated in the curricular documents reviewed in Chapter 3, such as communicative competence, intercultural awareness and metalinguistic awareness. It is key however, that, as Maynard (2012) asserts, PMFLs should be made relevant for pupils, as a lack of relevance leads to a deficiency in motivation, both in the short and long term. Maynard also claims several key teaching approaches should be adopted when implementing the PMFL, including teaching in the target language. This is already advocated in the Irish Primary Language Curriculum, as well as the importance of developing communicative and literacy skills in the PMFL. This point is reiterated by Jones and McLachlan (2009), who make the fantastic point that "in order to provide pupils with an appropriate cognitive and meta-linguistic challenge, teachers need to move away from rote learning and word-level work, and allow pupils an opportunity to experiment with language, to test it and produce it" (p.61). This can be done, according to Jones and McLachlan through a variety of ways, such as creating opportunities for communication, both in the PMFL lesson and embedded into school routines, along with cross-curricular integration. This last point links well with the much discussed CLIL approach.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a teaching methodology used for the simultaneous teaching and learning of both content (e.g., in a Science/History/Physical Education

topic) and language (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). Most research into CLIL documents its extensive benefits in language learning (Dalton-Puffer and Smit, 2007, Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Pérez-Cañado, 2012). Roiha and Sommier (2018) have found that CLIL education formed an incredibly positive attitude towards the target language which seemed to be rather enduring and persistent. Given the dual intention of the methodology (i.e., Content *and* Language), it is worth considering its potentially significant value to the ongoing issues of timetabling and curriculum overload, especially in this country, with an integrated Primary Language Curriculum being implemented (NCCA, 2019).

4.3.7 Time Allocation

In relation to timetabling and time allocation, researchers in general, postulate that allocating and maintaining a specific amount of time to the MFL lesson(s) in the week has a significant impact on the pupils' language learning and language progression (Driscoll, Jones, Martin, Graham-Matheson, Dismore, Sykes, 2004; Graham et al., 2017). Driscoll et al.'s systematic review (2004) of the characteristics of effective primary MFL teaching made the notable assertion that in relation to the potential time issue, not only do primary class teachers know their pupils very well, they also, "…when appropriately trained, have the opportunity to use the foreign language incidentally throughout the day, thereby maximising learning time" (p.5). Such a multi-faceted assertion could have implications not only for the timetabling of the MFL, but also for the potential teaching models that could be introduced.

Graham et al. (2017) conducted a study of the lexical and grammatical knowledge of 252 learners of French across the last two years of primary school and the first year of secondary school. They found that pupils who had received the minimum of 60 minutes per week did significantly better than other groups that had received less contact time, reinforcing the argument that the more time spent teaching and learning the language, the more beneficial it is for the learner. What is interesting about this finding, is that, in Graham et al.'s study, the schools that allocated most time to the language were employing teachers with significant language proficiency (degree or high levels of linguistic competence) and had completed specialist teacher training in the area of French teaching. However, the teacher in the school allocating the least amount of time (15 minutes per week), despite having a degree in French, had received little training in its teaching delivery.

Additionally, theory versus practice is important to keep in mind, as Collen (2020) found out in the Language Trends Survey, where, despite 9 out 10 respondent schools planning a designated time per week, 50% reported that the time allocation was less than 45 minutes per week. It is important to note that Collen's, Driscoll's and Graham et al.'s studies have produced key findings. This could be worth keeping in mind, when the data of this thesis is analysed, and conclusions and recommendations are presented later, especially given that an overloaded curriculum has been such an insurmountable block to the primary MFL implementation.

4.3.8 Cultural/Intercultural Competence

Since the dawn of the new century, an ever more interconnected global society, has increased the emphasis put on cultural competence in the language classroom (Ben Maad, 2016; Rantz and Horan, 2005). In Michael Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence published in 1997, the task is given to MFL teachers (at all levels) to scaffold learners, not only through the language learning process, but also through the acquisition of various competencies related to intercultural competence. However, despite this focus, and the evolution of attitudes and skills in this regard, it seems that there is disagreement as to whether the necessary shift in the language teaching paradigm is occurring. Even in a reasonably recent article, Obilişteanu and Niculescu (2018) describe the progress of developing intercultural competence as a *new* way of thinking and teaching, "…in which the teacher naturally and harmoniously combines the linguistic and cultural elements in the educational process during all types of lessons, irrespective of the topic being dealt with" (p.345).

Despite being written thirteen years previously, Rantz and Horan (2005) propose that the idea of intercultural competence "implies the development of a combination of knowledge, attitudes, skills and values which all imply different types of learning, different pedagogical objectives and approaches" (p.211). The benefits of integrating cultural competence into the language class are clear, as it nurtures open-mindedness, while at the same time fosters and develops a sensitivity, empathy and tolerance of cultural difference (Driscoll and Simpson, 2015). However, while agreeing with these positions and echoing the importance that should be allocated to intercultural competence, some researchers do not necessarily think that this fundamental change in language teaching exists yet (Ben Maad, 2016). Notwithstanding these disagreements,

it could be argued that in the literature across the various empirical and more theoretical studies, there is consensus as to its importance for inclusion in any language teaching programme.

4.3.9 Teacher Education and Resourcing

In order to make any language programme successful, it must be sustainable (Maynard, 2012). Maynard proposes that for it to be sustainable, four areas need to be developed: Transition, Delivery Models, Teachers' Attitudes and Confidence, and Training (p104). While the other factors alluded to by Maynard feature elsewhere in this chapter, in this section, the last issue from Maynard, training, will be explored. Graham et al. (2017) investigated the impact of teacher factors on primary pupils' linguistic progress. Interestingly, in addition to the teacher's level of language proficiency, it was their level of subject-related training that had the most significant effect on the pupils' test results. However, the most useful and effective training does not always exist. Low et al. (1995) concluded that continuing high quality, professional development, helps to maintain teacher's language proficiency and confidence in teaching the language.

According to Keogh-Bryan (2019), New Zealand had seen significant success in the expansion of primary language learning through professional development and supplementary resourcing. It is important however that resources are specifically and effectively targeted and appropriate to the needs of the learner/teacher (Met and Rhodes, 1990). Research conducted by Barton et al. (2009) found that the provision of targeted teacher professional development, combined with effective resources, would resolve issues of negative self-efficacy and insufficient teacher skillset. Holmes and Myles (2019) agree and recommend a government-funded professional development programme for primary teachers on a national scale to develop language proficiency, methodological understanding and subject knowledge. Collen (2020) reports that 28% of teachers opine that "a lack of language specific CPD" (p.7) is a significant challenge to language implementation.

4.4 Research on Primary MFLs in Wales

As previously outlined, Wales was selected as a comparative jurisdiction for several reasons; its dual national language, in this case, Welsh and English, the fact that a primary MFL is a relatively new addition to the curriculum, its relative population size when compared to the Republic of Ireland (3.1million, in comparison to Ireland's 4.8million), as well as its geographical proximity to

this jurisdiction, make it an interesting comparative. While in Chapter 2, the historical language context and policy direction from Wales was outlined, in this section, empirical research from Wales will be presented on the topic providing the bigger picture of primary MFL implementation, and therefore offering valuable findings to inform future recommendations.

Assigned a non-statutory status in Wales, primary MFLs are available as an option for schools to implement. How this equates on the frontline of primary education is evident in a succession of reports produced by the Welsh Assembly Government and the British Council (Arad Consulting, 2010; Tinsley and Board, 2015; Tinsley and Board, 2017; Tinsley, 2018; Tinsley/Alcantara Communications, 2019; Arad Research/British Council, 2019). These reports provide an interesting comparison of the ambition for primary modern foreign languages, versus the reality in schools.

A pilot project in primary MFLs took place in two phases in Wales from 2003-2009 (Arad Consulting, 2010), with a combination of 118 primary schools and 18 secondary schools involved in local cluster arrangements around the country. The Welsh Assembly Government commissioned Arad Consulting to evaluate the pilot project and provide findings and recommendations. Interestingly, there was no specific prescribed model of delivery, but ultimately the clusters could be categorised under three models: peripatetic, secondary-led and primary-led. Interestingly these were much the same models in the MLPSI in Ireland with some schools successfully working in clusters (MLPSI, 2012).

The conclusions from the Welsh pilot were in general, exceptionally positive, with some very noteworthy findings:

- The pilot showed a significant positive impact on the pupils' attitudes and motivation towards learning a language.
- Additional benefits were apparent on pupils' general literacy and oracy.
- There was increased confidence for pupils with Special Educational Needs.
- The pilot established and strengthened the transition among schools in the clusters.

- While the primary-led model successfully delivered the pilot's objectives, both the secondary-led and peripatetic models were found to be potentially sustainable in the long-term, dependent on sufficient investment in specialist primary MFL teachers.

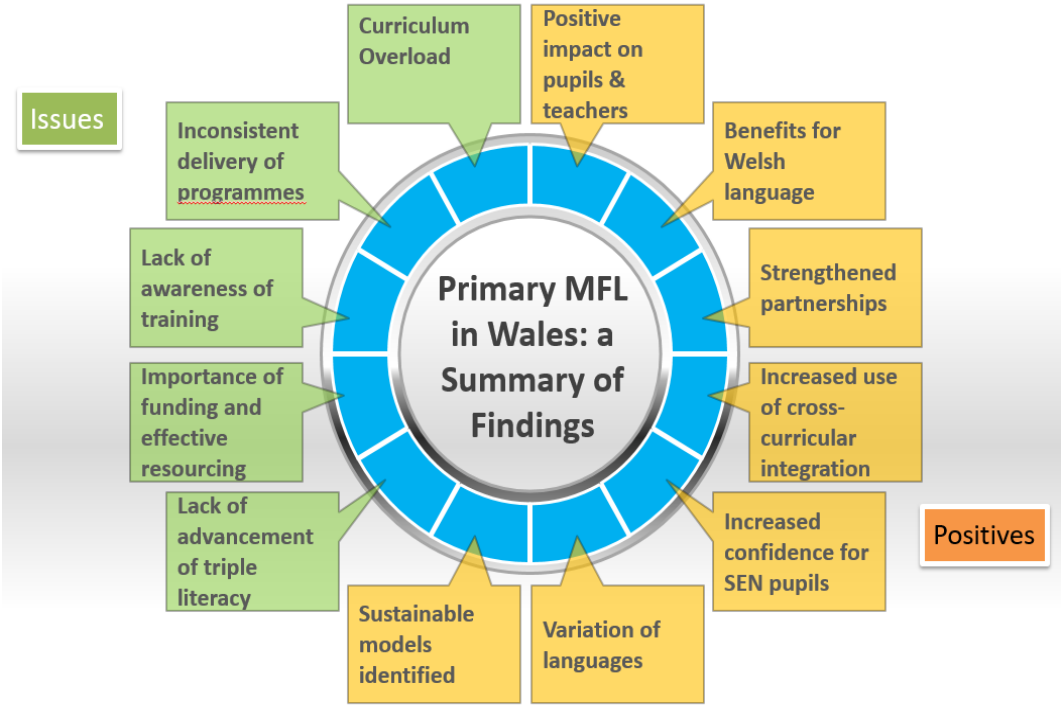
In addition, the long-term results were positive, 'bucking the trend' of significant decreases in language results and take-up at secondary level. A major weakness of the pilot, however, was the lack of advancement for triple literacy, i.e., Welsh, English and the MFL, which subsequently became a key focus of the Welsh Government (Welsh Government, 2011).

Successive '*Language Trends'* reports have published findings on language provision in Wales over several years and in two of the reports, (Tinsley and Board, 2016; Tinsley/Alcantara Communications, 2019) they provide interesting insights into how PMFL is being integrated on a national scale. The reports were commissioned in the context of the Welsh Assembly Government's *Global Futures* aspirations, as outlined in Chapter 2. For the purposes of this review, the most current report will be discussed.

An interesting statistic that was apparent form the beginning is the improvement in language-teaching take-up: in 2016, only 28 % of primary schools reported that they were providing a MFL (Tinsley and Board, 2016), while 39 % of primary schools reported provision in 2019. Notably, 12 % do not intend teaching a MFL/international language at all (Tinsley/Alcantara Communications, 2019). As in the MLPSI, most primary schools are reportedly teaching French, however, in Wales an increasingly broad variation of languages are provided to include languages such as Mandarin. Currently,37 % of schools rely on the class teacher to deliver the subject, when compared to 30% in 2016, which is, potentially encouraging, as it could show an increase in the language teaching capacity within the system. However, a worrying finding is, that only 25% of schools teaching the language are following a systematic programme and timetable. This demonstrates concerns over sustainability and its status in the primary curriculum. Tinsley also found that issues of timetabling, lack of funding and lack of training were major frustrations for some schools: e.g. "I just don't see how teachers can take this on as well. We are still struggling to teach Welsh effectively" and "Our issue is funding - not interest" (p.15).

The British Council also produced its own research by commissioning Arad Research to investigate multilingualism in primary schools in Wales (Arad Research/British Council, 2019). This impact study looked at how the *Global Futures* strategy was working in ten schools in Wales, conducting a combination of interviews with key stakeholders or visiting the schools. Some key findings from the research were extremely positive, with "a range of positive impacts on pupils, teachers, the wider school and regional partnerships" (p.6). Notably, schools are developing "creative approaches" (p.5) in teaching the MFL, by integrating across the curriculum. Furthermore, both Welsh-medium and English-medium schools reported benefits from linking Welsh to the MFL. Significantly, the combination of teacher expertise, with relevant and flexible training, and useful resources, have all been crucial for the success of the implementation. However, for the programme to be sustainable some issues remain, including the need for increased provision, resourcing, curriculum overload, and the importance for teachers to have access to funding for the training, with "structured and systematic approaches" (p.6) required for professional development.

Figure 10: A Summary of the Findings from the Welsh Literature



While not necessarily showing the situation in all schools, the findings (see Figure 10 above) did demonstrate some overlapping matters that realistically could have significant corollaries for the

Irish context, from long-term accountability to linguistically sustainable perspectives. An amalgam of various findings from Wales, therefore, have provided some key areas of note and it will be of interest to identify any comparisons between the Welsh studies and the data of this research.

4.5 Research on Primary MFLs in Ireland

It has been asserted that any early or primary MFL learning in the Republic of Ireland would take place in a sociolinguistic context, which differs greatly from its European counterparts (Harris, 2007). However, it must be argued that, as demonstrated by the Welsh education system, this does not excuse the fact that Ireland remains the only country in Europe where a MFL is neither compulsory nor optional at primary level (Eurydice, 2012). However, as evident in Chapter 2, this situation may change in the near future. Ironically, the Irish research in this area is bookended by seminal studies commissioned by the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (Harris, 1991; Keogh Bryan, 2020). Both made positive recommendations about the introduction of a MFL into the primary curriculum. This, despite their arguable intransigence on the issue in the intervening years. Nevertheless, the clear lack of engagement with or commitment to the teaching and learning of primary MFLs is echoed in all literature searches for this review. There is undoubtedly a significant dearth of Irish research in relation to this area. Rather than replicate the content of Chapter 2 in this section of the review, emphasis will be placed on the synthesis and analysis of documents.

Recent decades have seen the NCCA provide some discussion and research papers on Primary MFLs. As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the first real step taken by the NCCA was in 1993, when they performed a pros/cons analysis of introducing a MFL at primary level. Despite the positive arguments presented in the document, which outlined some potential benefits of the subject's inclusion, the longstanding issue of curriculum overload was something of an insurmountable challenge. The NCCA advocated against the introduction of a ML in the primary school curriculum (NCCA, 1993). The following year saw the NCCA investigate the possible inclusion of a European Dimension in the primary curriculum. This time rather than simply presenting the potential for its introduction and subsequently making the 'curriculum overload' counterargument, a potential panacea was identified in the guise of "a cross-curricular approach involving different aspects of the curriculum" (NCCA, 1994, p.4). Providing a constructive solution

in this way was noteworthy, and arguably it provided the 'shard of light' needed in order to begin the process of piloting the primary MFL.

With the advent of the new century, the Pilot Project for MFLs in Primary Schools had been given some ground in which to grow its roots, including official curricular documents. Subsequently the NCCA commissioned a report, which, peculiarly, remains unpublished (2001), investigating the use of the Draft Curriculum Guidelines for MFLs in classrooms. The report identified some extremely positive findings regarding the reality of the document's implementation, and in fact, underlined the impact of cross-curricular integration, the potential silver-bullet against the barrier of curriculum overload (INTO, 2015). It reported that, despite implementation of a new curriculum being in its infancy, 95% of class teachers were reported to be integrating the target language into other areas of the curriculum. With the introduction of a new curricular framework on the horizon (NCCA, 2020), such a point could prove crucial and will have implications for the future training of teachers, both ITE and at CPD levels.

Regarding the standout research on the topic of primary MFLs in Ireland, John Harris produced three significant documents. His 1991 report commissioned by the INTO, along with his two-part evaluation of the Pilot Project for Modern Languages (subsequently the MLPSI) (Harris and Conway, 2002; Harris and O'Leary, 2007), are key texts at the forefront of primary MFL research in this country.

The area of primary languages became of interest to the INTO in 1991 as they sought to investigate the possibility of "access to foreign language, particularly the inclusion of a modern European language in the curriculum at primary level" (Harris, 1991 p.2). Essentially the 'first of its kind' piece of research, saw Harris and the INTO present a variety of findings in relation to the existence, if any, of primary MFLs at that time. They found, through a nationwide survey of primary schools (responses = 1834/3247 school) that almost 24% of respondent schools at that point were providing some level of ML teaching at primary level, albeit, in something of a resourcing vacuum. While this would seem to be a significant positive finding, it must carry the caveat that most of this teaching provision was taking place outside of school time. Interestingly,

the communicative approach as advocated by Harris is this research, was implemented seven years later in the draft curriculum.

It would take a further decade for Harris to be involved in researching the area of primary MFLs again. An independent evaluation of the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI) took place in two phases. Phase 1 was carried out by Harris and Conway (2002) and Phase 2, by Harris and O'Leary (2007). This two-phased study took place in 22 schools involved in the MLPSI and involved a plethora of research instruments that will be presented in more detail, along with findings from a survey of key stakeholders, later in this review.

The evaluation found that significant linguistic progress was made by most of the pupils and all schools. A key finding shows that the MLPSI "…succeeded in installing a teaching programme which has a significant emphasis on communication, an experiential orientation to learning and a focus on pupil enjoyment of the learning process" (Harris, 2004 p.50). While the overarching sentiment of both phases was generally positive, some areas were found to be less so. These areas will be discussed later in this review. However, the evaluation found that, the initiative "…has shown that the teaching of MFLs at primary level can be successfully extended to types of schools and pupils which previously had relatively limited access to them" (Harris and O'Leary, 2009 p.4).

Despite the success of the project in Ireland, the evaluation recognises the constraints that remain:

- curriculum overload
- questions about transition
- inadequate linguistic competence of teachers
- the potential negative impact on the Irish language.

The last point is perplexing, as it comes despite the variety of research on how learning a language can benefit metalinguistic awareness (Bild and Swain, 1989; O'Duibhir and Cummins, 2012). Indeed, Harris and O'Leary (2009) found that 31% of class teachers in the MLPSI evaluation experienced a positive effect on the Irish language. Additionally, 92.5% of class teachers in Irish-

medium schools reported cross-linguistic benefits. O'Duibhir and Cummins (2012), had been commissioned by the NCCA to examine how best to implement an integrated language curriculum at primary schools. Interestingly, they found that "The L1 curriculum should be cross-referenced with the L2 and MFL curricula and use largely the same structures and descriptors" (p.16). This point could be crucial to potentially developing a primary MFL curriculum in conjunction with the present PLC.

These significant challenges were confirmed as barriers to ML implementation at primary level in the subsequent feasibility reports by the NCCA (2005 and 2008). However, Keogh-Bryan (2019) (commissioned by the NCCA), made a contradictory assertion, that "Investing in foreign language learning and/or the languages of newcomers, does not constitute a deficit in other areas of learning" (p.9).

From an economic standpoint, the implementation of primary MFLs is something that has not gone unnoticed, with a coalition of voices putting forward its support. In 2004 and 2005, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) and the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) both emphasised that languages were a key priority for the Irish economy and strongly advocated the extension of the MLPSI, to make languages compulsory at primary level. This was affirmed by the Royal Irish Academy in its National Languages Strategy (2011).

Strikingly, while the Department of Education and Skills kept their council on the issue, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (DETI), in its Action Plan (2010) made a strong argument for languages, declaring that "the main challenge for Ireland…is to become a truly multilingual society, where the ability to learn and use two or more languages is taken for granted and fostered at every stage of the education system and through lifelong education" (DETI, 2010, p.32).

More recently, Keogh-Bryan (2019), produced an extensive piece of work (on behalf of the NCCA) regarding the practicability of integrating a primary MFL into the upcoming redeveloped curriculum. In this document, Keogh-Bryan investigates the teaching and learning of primary MFLs in a variety of international jurisdictions, in addition to examining the Irish context and the

potential implications that a MFL may have on existing languages in the primary classroom. Her findings were extremely positive and found that not only are some schools continuing to teach a MFL in their normal school day, are doing so, successfully, with many benefits being emphasised, including the social, academic, and communicative development of the pupils. Keogh-Bryan is at pains to emphasise that the findings of these school 'vignettes' are not generalizable, and that the schools featured in the report are not necessarily representative of the school population on a national scale.

That said, the six schools featured, do come from diverse contexts and vary in size from large urban to smaller rural schools, including a *Gaelscoil*, (Irish-medium school), a Community School, a DEIS (designated disadvantaged) urban school, a DEIS rural school and a *Gaeltacht* (Irish-speaking region) school. While it is pertinent to acknowledge the lack of generalizability, it is equally relevant to concede the broad base of schools successfully delivering a MFL in their varying contexts, with some doing so on a whole-school basis. While again, not a generalizable characteristic, it is nonetheless significant that 5 out of the 6 featured schools had been involved in some way in the MLPSI. Keogh-Bryan gives credit to the localised nature of the successful implementation, emphasising the important role of a potential "language ambassador" within a school (p.123) to develop and nurture a culture of language learning at a local level. In the same vein, the study highlights that while generally a top-down approach from Government develops any educational change, the importance of a bottom-up approach cannot be underestimated.

It is obvious through, reviewing the Irish literature, that historically there has not been a clear consensus regarding the implementation of a ML at primary level. In fact, what is most apparent is the number of 'consistent contradictions'. From the clear positivity in both Harris' and Keogh-Bryan's research, and the assertion of the DETI, to the more nebulous conclusions of historic NCCA reports, significant disparities remain. However, given the more recent NCCA commission, and the place that is being advocated for primary MFLs in the future, could this mean that a blueprint for the future has been drawn up, or could it merely be a false dawn for primary MFLs?

4.6 Perceptions of Key Stakeholders (Teachers and Pupils)

Even with the historic scarcity of research studying perceptions of pupils and teachers in the primary MFLs context, an increasing number of studies have been conducted in recent years

(Harris, 2004, Hood, 2006; MacRoary and McLachlan, 2009, Legg, 2013, Chambers 2019). Touching on the Irish context (Harris and Conway, 2002 Harris and O'Leary, 2007) and moving on to the Scottish and English research, (Martin, 2012; Tierney and Gallastegi, 2011; Barton et al., 2009), an interesting depiction of perceptions develops, providing useful and constructive impressions of primary MFLs from both the teaching and learning perspectives. In this section of the review the perceptions of teachers (including headteachers) and pupils, will be investigated since any empirical evidence will link directly to this research project. It is important to keep in mind however, that the simple binary responses of specifically positive versus specifically negative should be avoided in order to establish a more nuanced investigation of the all-encompassing findings and not necessarily undermine what was being presented in the empirical studies in the first place.

4.6.1 Pupil Perceptions

In terms of pupils' attitudes, a broad range of findings has been presented. Taking Harris' research (2004) along with that of Maynard (2012), Martin (2012) and Tierney and Gallastegi, (2011) combines notable results on pupils' attitudes towards ML learning in Ireland, England and Scotland. Both Harris and Martin's studies found that most pupils were positive about their language learning experience and had developed a positive attitude towards language learning. "Hardly any children claimed to dislike language learning…" (Martin, 2012, p.350). Maynard (2012) found that the pupils "thoroughly enjoyed the lessons" (p2) and showed positive perceptions to language learning. The two-part independent evaluation which was conducted by Harris and Conway (2002) and Harris and O'Leary (2009) took place in 22 schools involved in the MLPSI and the instruments used were pupil-questionnaires, linguistic assessments and teacher-surveys, which included class teachers, principals and all MFL teachers involved in the initiative.

All pupils assessed in the MLPSI evaluation had made significant progress with their language learning and no class was failing in their linguistic development (Harris and Conway, 2002). This progress translated to the survey findings that most pupils developed positive attitudes to MFL learning, with 73% agreeing that they got real enjoyment from learning the MFL. While 81% of pupils acknowledged that learning a MFL can be enjoyable, most pupils enjoyed the emphasis on active learning methodologies, such as songs and games in the lessons (Harris, 2004). It is also worth mentioning that 84% of pupils felt that they were happy to have learned a primary MFL

rather than wait until secondary school (MLPSI, 2012, p.40). These findings demonstrate the significant positivity that existed attitudinally towards learning a MFL, which may have an influence on any future language implementation in Ireland. The perceptions of teachers will be discussed later in this section.

Intriguingly, in the Scottish context, both sides of the attitudinal spectrum have been evident in the findings. While Tierney and Gallastegi's study also confirms the positive attitude of pupils, it also highlights that data was not without negativity, with one pupil declaring that, "I think French is the most boring language in the world" (Analysis of Girls' opinions p.490) and another proclaiming that "I hate French because very boring and very very not interesting!" (Analysis of Boys' opinions p.491). Several other studies on pupil perceptions (Chambers, 1999, Stables and Wikely, 1999) take this attitude even further, with the consensus that motivation declines as the pupils get older. Whether this is evident in terms of the empirical research linking to transition, will be interesting to ascertain. However, Chambers' (2019) study on Pupil Perceptions, found that pupils at the end of their primary schooling, while they enjoyed their lessons, they had no knowledge of their assessed achievement or indeed their progress in PMFL. Pupils in their first year of secondary school articulated their frustrations at repeating the same/similar material. Such observations could be imperative for an Irish context in the future. Regardless of the contrasting findings, all these studies, as well as Nikolov's (1999) research from Hungary, demonstrate the significance of intrinsic motivation when developing pupils' positive attitudes to ML learning. In order to maximise the pupil's potential with regards to ML learning, these findings are important to keep in mind.

4.6.2: Teacher Perceptions

Studies that have garnered the opinions of teachers have yielded, once again, a broad spectrum of findings. Firstly, several studies identify key barriers to the feasibility of a MFL being implemented at primary level. In Barton et al.'s study (2009), for example, they concluded that, after conducting numerous interviews and questionnaires of teachers and head teachers, the teachers were hesitant about language teaching due to their own lack of subject knowledge and expertise. This, again, demonstrates the role of self-efficacy in teaching this (and potentially any) subject. These findings were confirmed and further dissected in the QCDA's (2001), Barnes' (2006) and McLachlan's (2009) research findings which highlighted teachers' issues with

curriculum overload, deficiency of language skills and lack of understanding of any potential links between literacy and learning a ML. Although acknowledging some of these constraints in her study, Legg (2013) concludes that most teachers who took part, felt that the teaching and learning of a ML should indeed take place at primary level. However, Legg's research was reasonably small-scale, and therefore, its generalizability could certainly be called into question.

Several researchers have identified a variety of factors that have had considerable influence on teacher perceptions, both pre-service and in-service (Woodgate-Jones, 2008; Maynard, 2012; Marques, 2017; Finch, Theakston and Serratrice, 2018). Such studies have found indifference, lack of motivation, difficulties with language proficiency, and contrasts with respect to the hierarchical place of the primary MFL (or lack thereof). Mellegard and Pettersen (2016) found that the status which is given to the subject by the teacher plays a key role in its success. It is crucially important, as Maynard (2012) suggests, that "trainees enter the profession enthused and aware that languages should be an integral part of the curriculum" (p.2). How this is applied in initial teacher training is discussed by Woodgate-Jones (2008), who presented findings on the Primary Language Teacher Training Project. As part of the project, over 30 colleges/universities providing initial teacher education (ITE) programmes offered an integrated PMFL specialism as part of the course, which involved an optional four-week placement overseas to use the target language in a primary school setting. Not only was language proficiency improved, but also intercultural competence, as well as teachers' attitudes to the language as a curricular subject. Integrating such elements into Irish ITE programmes may be worth considering.

Additionally, there are some contrasting studies that have shown significant positivity towards learning a ML. Cable et al. (2010) convey principals' and teachers' opinions that pupils learning a ML are seeing significant advantages from the experience, including improvements in literacy competence. In the phased evaluation of the MLPSI (Harris and Conway, 2002 Harris and O'Leary, 2007), opinions were gathered from language teachers, class teachers and principals. All findings were generally very positive, with 98 % of language teachers of the opinion that pupils benefitted from learning the language, and 89 % reporting a favourable parental reaction. Furthermore, 93.2 % of principals and 89.6 % of class teachers held favourable attitudes to the teaching of the ML. Another noteworthy finding was that 89 % of Class teachers saw a positive impact on the pupils'

learning; identifying increased linguistic and cultural awareness as benefits. Given that these schools found themselves in the middle of a pilot project, it is fascinating to find that a significant majority of stakeholders felt that the project should be extended to more or all schools, with 94.1% of principals and 88 % of class teachers of this opinion. Given this evidence, it might be proposed that these positive opinions could be motivating factors for the feasibility and potential sustainability of a primary MFL in the Irish context. This echo an important point by Rivers, Robinson, Harwood, and Brecht (2013), that "First and foremost, support for language learning is built through the excellence of programs, as motivated learners will communicate that excitement to what may be a more receptive parental audience than in previous generations" (p. 336).

4.7 Progression and Transition from Primary to Secondary

Progression and transition from primary to secondary is a key issue in order to effectively, and ultimately successfully, implement a primary MFLs curriculum (Courtney, 2017; Blondin et al. 1998). Much of the literature has demonstrated that progression in the language learning, combined with primary/secondary transition, are major issues for the development of languages at primary level (Chambers, 2014; Jones, 2009). However, it is important to note that this is not exclusive to languages, as Chambers (2014) recognised, transition is an area of considerable challenge for pupils and their schools, irrespective of the subject being studied. Galton et al. (1999). For example, a report on how the progress of pupils can plateau, or at worst, significantly regress at the secondary level of education. Hunt et al., (2008), refers to the issue as being "…a serious hindrance to successful longer-term implementation and continued sustainability" (Hunt et al. 2008, p.3).

While difficult, nevertheless, it is not impossible and really needs efficient planning measures for its successful implementation (Hunt et al., 2005). Jones (2009) affirms this as needing "to be carefully planned to ensure continuing motivation and progression as part of a successful cross-phase learning experience" (p.30). In theory, this appears to be sensible and practical, but the reality is something quite different. Many studies have found that failure to plan for effective transition has resulted in much negativity, especially if teachers fail to capitalise on the previous language learning experience, which can lead to resentment and demotivation for pupils (Powell et al., 2000; Galton et al., 1999). This disillusionment has been reiterated by Bolster et al. (2004),

who highlight that failure to plan effectively has "contributed to the somewhat disillusioned attitude of a certain number of secondary school pupils" (p.39).

Whereas these studies were based in the UK, Hill et al. (1998) found similar results in Australia, going so far as to find inertia and torpidity rather than progress in language learning. McElwee (2009) asserts that the distinct lack of motivation during language lessons during the transition period was a direct result of content repetition, thus hindering progress. The lack of understanding of secondary teachers also became apparent in Galton et al.'s (1999) research, which also looked at progression and its effect on transition. They identified that a substantial number of secondary teachers completely failed to capitalise on the pupils' previous linguistic knowledge from their experiences at primary level, being firmly of the belief that beginning with a blank canvas was the most appropriate starting point for secondary level language learning. This was echoed in a study by Powell et al. (2001), where students, in the first year of secondary school, showed resentment and dissatisfaction in respect of this 'clean slate' approach. In their 2004 study, Bolster et al. found that this lack of building on the progress made at primary level, had "contributed to the somewhat disillusioned attitude of a certain number of secondary school pupils" (p.38).

Such frustrations from students substantiate the importance of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), showing exceptional demotivation even after a short period at secondary level. Does all this empirical evidence demonstrate issues of misconception on the side of the secondary teacher, or are these issues the fault of the primary teacher? Could Gorwood's (1991) assertion be correct, that the most fundamental problem with transition is the distinct lack of communication between teachers at both levels? Jones (2009) further demonstrates this issue, going so far as to quote one secondary teacher, "I often have to unteach incorrect French that has been taught incorrectly at primary school" (p.31). There is no consensus as to whether these findings are generally the fault of the primary or the secondary sector, and potentially it could be a bit of both.

It is evident from the research that primary-secondary transition is a crucially important step for children, in fact, Zeedyk et al. (2003) go so far as to describe it as "…one of the most difficult in

pupils' educational careers" (p.67). Various researchers have found certain aspects of transition to either contribute to or diminish the learning experiences of the pupils. Jones and McLachlan (2009) propose that "…continuity is essential for children's motivation and progression in their language learning" (p.117). Courtney (2017) looked at the concept of transition from another angle, investigating the similarities and differences in language teaching at both primary and secondary level (Year 6 and Year 7), as well as how these would impact on the pupils' motivation and progression. The study found that the students in year 7 had become increasingly critical of the teaching that they were encountering in language lessons, which was a more formal experience for the pupils, with increased emphasis on literacy, grammar and assessment, and a higher expectation on accuracy. They found lessons boring and unchallenging.

In order to measure the students' language proficiency, a reasonably wide-ranging set of assessment tasks were administered to each student (an oral role-play task, an oral photo description task, and a free-writing task). These took place at three time points through the 12 months of the study. Interestingly, despite the students' reported lack of motivation, the students' language proficiency improved over the year. Such progression was, according to Courtney, "a result of inclusion of a series of…objective measures of language development used to evaluate learner progression" (p.17). Courtney concluded however, that a rebalance of the emphasis on literacy/oracy combined with increased emphasis on more interesting intercultural activities (e.g., video links), had been important for the pupils' learning experience. The specificity of these findings could certainly inform future policies in this regard and disseminating such information could bridge the 'information gap' that research has shown between teachers at both levels. Indeed, some researchers (Jones, 2010), assert that language teachers at secondary level can sometimes feel disadvantaged due to the formality of their lessons as opposed to the relative 'fun' that is had at primary level. This perception is arguably based on a lack of genuine knowledge of what can be taught and learned in the primary context (Jones and McLachlan, 2009).

In the face of the general negativity towards transition, some studies have found success stories (Tinsley and Board, 2015; Wicksteed, 2008). Graham et al. (2016) found contradictory evidence to most studies, that most language learners held positive attitudes to learning French by the

end of Year 7, for the most part as a result of progress and more challenging lessons at secondary level. In her 2008 study, Wicksteed found some localised best practice, including effective continuity through communication between a secondary level school and its feeder primary schools. The most recent British Council Language Trends Survey (Tinsley and Board, 2015) also found some examples of good practice, including some secondary schools offering language teachers to their feeder schools to aid continuity and joint primary/secondary language planning sessions. However, these are mainly due to localised good practice rather than national policies and are very inconsistent with the broader empirical evidence.

While so many of the studies reviewed in this section have demonstrated negative findings, with significant deficiencies in transition and progression, implementing a successful transition policy is not an insurmountable task. In fact, additionally, several studies have identified specific ideas for its improvement, such as Boodhoo's (2005) idea for improving initial teacher education. Hunt et al. (2008) point out that improved continuing professional development and funding would help to solve the issue. Additionally, some research emphasises the importance and long-term success of effective primary-secondary liaising (Bevis and Gregory, 2005; Burch and Vare, 2019). Burch and Vare's research evaluated how the '*Stepping Up in Modern Foreign Languages'* projects across England were developed and implemented in order to bridge the gap and align the teaching across the primary-secondary transition. Burch and Vare found that a sense of collegiality, local sharing of knowledge and expertise and particularly the quality of communication that existed between teachers, as responsible for the great success of the national projects. Fullan (2006) affirms this notion, identifying the importance of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), within which teachers can collaborate and share good practice. Additionally, and crucially, Specialist Languages Colleges (SLCs) in the UK have been given instruction to develop, nurture and sustain such collegial and sharing partnerships with local feeder primary schools (Davis, 2006) and have done so to great effect, by implementing successful transition policies from end of primary into secondary (Chambers, 2014). In the same piece of research, however, Chambers found that in schools where there was a lack of communication or collaboration, negative consequences were evident.

There are many credible suggestions for the establishment of successful transition and continuity between primary and secondary levels regarding the teaching of MFLs. Whether the numerous recommendations from experts are accepted and implemented by policymakers, and how the findings of this research will echo and inform in an Irish context, remains to be seen.

4.8 Conclusion

This literature review explored the research on MFL learning at primary level. Both the PGL and the empirical research have presented some noteworthy information and findings, identifying gaps in the present knowledge that this research may address. It is important to acknowledge some dissenting voices that have come through in the research (Huang, 2015; Jaekel et al., 2017) and their arguments have credence. Taking everything into account, however, from the substantial benefits for younger learners, to the generally positive perceptions of language learning both from a pupil and professional point of view, especially in Ireland, there are certainly tangible reasons for the implementation of a primary MFL (Keogh-Bryan, 2019; Kearney and Ahn, 2014; Hood, 2006).

Notwithstanding what has been said, while researchers and theorists have identified several key findings in relation to primary MFLs, including factors that may influence its successful implementation and long-term standing in the curriculum, issues remain. The factors that need to be borne in mind from the evidence base are challenging. In taking all the research into account, especially the perceptions and the various issues that have arisen, what remains unclear, are the actual circumstances that would need to exist for a MFL to be implemented in the primary school system in this country. While the simple binary choice of implementing a particular subject in a curriculum remains, the deeper lying potential that needs to be tapped into provides a broader spectrum of opinions and strongly held beliefs. This research will endeavour to go some way to address the gaps in the literature base. Not only will it identify the local issues that pertain to the Irish context and the difficulties with primary MFLs, but indeed it will attempt to pinpoint tangible ways to deal with these concerns. Whether it does so in reality, remains to be seen.

In this chapter I have considered a broad range of empirical research in relation to MFL learning in the context of primary classrooms in a variety of contexts. I have shown that while there has

not been overwhelming support for the introduction of a PMFL, there has been considerable positivity, especially in the studies from Ireland. The aim of this study is the identification of the perceived ideal conditions required for any potential introduction of PMFL. My research design and theoretical framework will be presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

"Research is an expression of faith in the possibility of progress. The drive that leads scholars to study a topic has to include the belief that new things can be discovered, that newer can be better, and that greater depth of understanding is achievable. Research, especially academic research, is a form of optimism about the human condition."

Henry Rosovsky (1990, p.89)

5.1 The Research Roadmap

In this chapter, I will present the research questions and how they were derived, to help the reader make connections between these and the overriding theoretical considerations explored in the chapter. It is important to note that this study gathered more than a simple '*vignette'* of perceptions and attitudes to MFL learning at primary level in Ireland. Through collecting opinions from a variety of key stakeholders, both with and without experience of the MLPSI (teachers, principals and pupils (6th class/primary and 3rd year/secondary)), the research provides key findings to inform potential implementation of a PMFL in Ireland. The two-part Literature Review in Chapters 2 and 3 was heavily influenced by this intention and established a Theoretical Framework in which to position the research, and present the prescriptive literature, along with thematic studies and comparisons with the practice in other countries.

This chapter should build upon its predecessors, examining the process of identifying the research questions, presenting my own philosophical stance as a researcher, along with an examination of the research design, the methodology and the methods employed. Hitchcock and Hughes' contention (1995) that "ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions; these in turn, give rise to issues of instrumentation and data collection" (p. 21), has determined the process of the study and ultimately the structure of this chapter.

5.1.1 Identifying the Research Questions

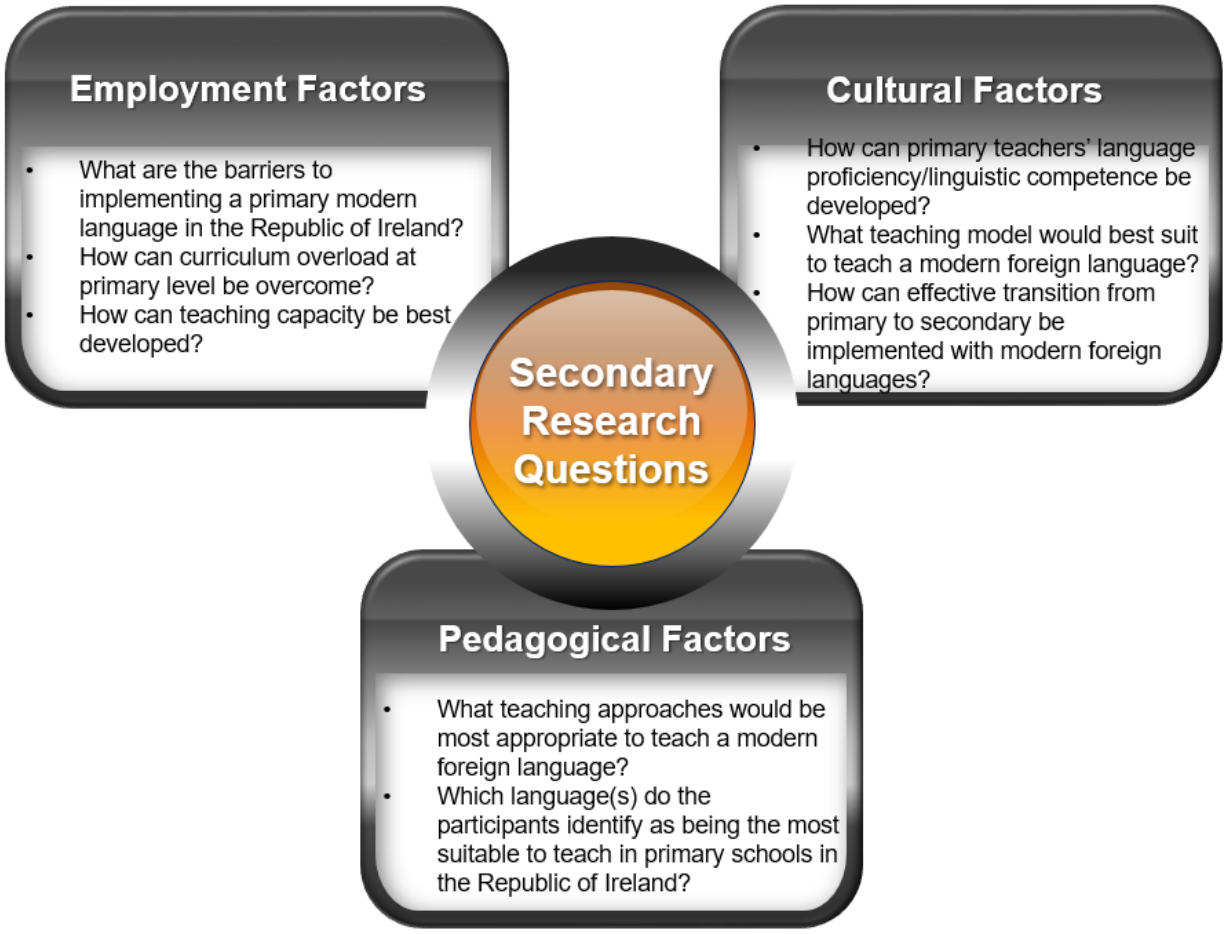
Cresswell (2014) gives some guidance on the identification of research questions. For Cresswell, such an issue is reasonably straightforward as the initial research problem and the subsequent research questions come "…from a void in the literature, and conflict in research results in the literature, topics that have been neglected in the literature" (p.20). In this scenario, reflecting on a combination of the NCCA Feasibility Reports and the two extremely positive evaluations of the MLPSI (Harris and O'Leary, 2007; Harris and Conway, 2002), which involved a combination of garnering perceptions from a selection of pupils, teachers and principals from a selection of MLPSI schools, along with a summative assessment of the language learning that took place,

awoke in me a form of cognitive dissonance. Despite this, albeit small-scale success, why does the MLPSI, or an alternative programme, curriculum or initiative not exist at primary level in Ireland? Could it simply be that the historically contradictory findings from the NCCA reports are in fact the true reflection of the situation? In the absence of any clear guidance or direction in respect of MFLs, a vacuum exists whereby schools are, arguably, being, dissuaded from teaching one. Consequently, it became an area of curiosity for this researcher, which began with research questions featuring the attempted identification of reasons why primary MFLs do not exist in Ireland. Looking at the topic from the negative was not, however, my intention and realistically, what was envisaged, was how could a MFL be implemented in Ireland. This eventually culminated in the development of a central research question:

> *What are the perceived ideal conditions necessary for successful implementation of a primary MFL curriculum in the Republic of Ireland?*

In addition to the core question, three subsets of secondary research questions have refined the '*prima facie'* foci of the study (see Figure 11) and if we take Payne and Payne's assertion that, "in research we work from 'knowing less' towards 'knowing more'" (2004, p.114), it was envisaged that some very thought-provoking and useful data would be produced. These questions have been partly determined by the data generated by the pilot study, which was conducted (to be discussed in more detail later in this chapter) in addition to the literature reviewed, both PGL and empirical.

Figure 11: Secondary Research Questions



In writing this methodology chapter, Crotty's (2003) assertion that there should be a tangible coherence between the epistemological stance entreated by the researcher and the methodological approach that he/she espouses (Crotty, 2003), has been influential in its structure. The first part of this chapter, therefore, focuses on my own ontological and epistemological position. Subsequently, a treatise on the various paradigmatic links and comparisons between the two major schools of thought (qualitative v quantitative) will be presented. The researcher's positionality, the methods chosen for sampling, data collection and analysis, along with the methodological paradigm that justifies their selection, will follow. The research design and how it was implemented will then form the central discussion of this chapter. Ethical considerations will be presented in the concluding section. In both this chapter and the next, through a combination of emerging categories and themes from the data, the links to the reviewed literature, and the provision of solid justification for the methods, a

reliable, valid and definitively authentic picture, will emerge of the perceptions from key stakeholders on the implementation of a primary MFL in the Republic of Ireland.

5.2 Philosophy and the Research:

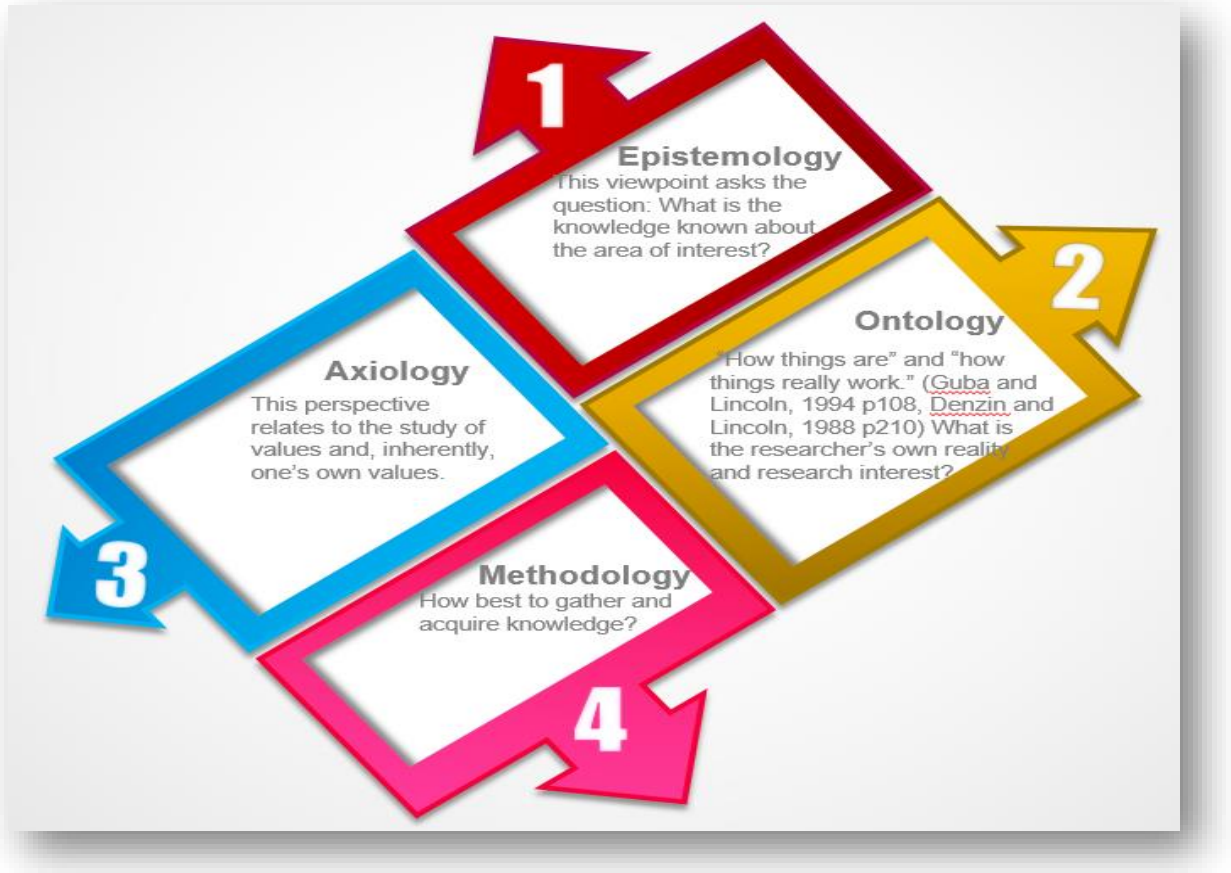
Before presenting the methodology behind this research, it would be beneficial to outline my own understanding of research paradigms and any philosophical assumptions. Kuhn's (1962) definition of a research paradigm as a "set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed" (p.45) can serve well at the beginning of this discussion.

Guba (1990) and Guba and Lincoln (1994), further link this definition to the previously mentioned philosophical assumptions (see Figure 12):

- Ontological position: "How things are" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994 p.108), and essentially, how do things work. What is the researcher's own reality and research interest?
- Epistemological position: What is the known knowledge about the area of interest?
- Methodological viewpoint: How best to gather and acquire knowledge?

In addition to Guba and Lincoln's defining characteristics of a research paradigm, Heron and Reason (2007) argue that a research paradigm must consider a fourth aspect: axiology. Axiology relates to the study of values and, inherently, one's own values. Heron and Reason (2007) relate axiology to the "values of being, about what human states are to be valued simply because of what they are" (Heron and Reason, 1997, p. 287).

Figure 12: Characteristics of a Research Paradigm



These stances, for me, are principally oriented around the individual's construction and interpretation of reality, which can ultimately be influenced by an extensive range of factors (Vygotsky, 1987). As the research question suggests, individuals' perceptions of ideal conditions for implementing a PMFL, are being gathered in this research. When taking it from an ontological perspective, this study refers to, as Wilson (2013) asserts, "what…constitutes social reality" (p.80). In terms of axiology, it is believed that research grounded in polyvocality will "generate more holistic truth about a specific social reality" (Humphrey, 2013, p.8). It is important that as a neophyte researcher, I am aware that one's "…own situation in the world and how [one] perceives it is likely to inform [one's own] ontological position," (Costley, Elliot & Gibbs, 2010, p.81). My own positionality will be discussed later in this chapter, after examining and identifying the key paradigmatic links for this study.

5.3 Paradigmatic Links

Before deciding on methodological considerations, it was important to be cognisant of the association of certain paradigms with certain methodologies. Informed by a combination of

these paradigmatic alignments, along with the preceding chapters in the thesis, my intention in the selection of the research methodology was embedded in essentially an interpretive and social constructionist paradigm with the goal of identifying emerging "themes inherent in raw data" (Thomas, 2006, p. 2). I would, therefore, view myself, at this point, as primarily an interpretivist (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007), with constructivist views.

The interpretivist/constructivist paradigm which influenced this study, essentially drew from a combination of Husserl's phenomenology and the study of interpretive understanding called hermeneutics (Eichelberger, 1989 in Mertens, 2005, p.12). The intention of the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm was the vital element which determined the direction of the research: finding meaning in "the world of human experience" (Cohen & Mannion, 1994, p.36), asserting that "reality is socially constructed" (Mertens, 2005, p.12). In addition, it could be argued, as Willis (2007) does, that interpretive research could be viewed as being more subjective than objective. Willis (2007) argues that valuing subjectivity is an essential goal of the interpretivist paradigm, and "interpretivists eschew the idea that objective research on human behaviour is possible" (p.110). Smith (1993) develops this point further by asserting that interpretivists are in essence, '*anti-foundationalists'*, because "there is no particular right or correct path to knowledge, no special method that automatically leads to intellectual progress" (p.120). Creswell (2003) affirms this claim, stating that constructivists do not necessarily base their research on a given theory, but rather "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings" (Creswell, 2003, p.9) during the research itself. It is these assertions that have combined with the gap in the research to establish the direction of this study.

5.4 Identifying a Methodology

According to Cresswell (2014), "Research approaches are plans and the procedures for research that span the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation" (p. 3). From a methodology-building point of view, after identifying my own philosophical stance, it would be pertinent that the next step would be to discuss the various approaches to educational research and identify those that were key to my own research.

For many researchers, the area of educational research is generally divided into two main categories, that is, quantitative and qualitative research (Ary et al. 2010). According to Newman and Ridenour (1998), "Qualitative and quantitative research have philosophical roots in the naturalistic and the positivistic philosophies, respectively" (p.2). Quantitative research makes

use of measurement tools to gather empirical data in order to quantify and test a fixed hypothesis which is stated at the outset, in order to produce conclusive evidence (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007; Thomas, 2017). In contrast, qualitative research is predominantly an exploratory approach which emphasises understanding social phenomena, with the emergence of hypotheses or theory from the data a possibility, rather than a definite occurrence (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, 2005).

Marshall, (1996) makes the clear assertion that the research question should determine the choice between qualitative and quantitative methods rather than a researcher's positionality or epistemological viewpoint. While perhaps over-simplistic, he conveys that quantitative methods answer more mechanistic and measurable questions such as 'What?', as opposed to the aim of qualitative research studies being "to provide illumination and understanding of complex psychosocial issues and are most useful for answering humanistic 'Why?' and 'How?' questions" (p.522).

Given my own present philosophical stances, making comparisons between qualitative and quantitative methods became, arguably, something of a moot point. Such a point is given more clarity when taking an aspect of qualitative research as being, according to Elliott and Timulak (2005, p.147), that it relies "on linguistic rather than numerical data and employ[s] meaning-based rather than statistical forms of data analysis." Let us combine this assertion with that of Meyer (2001) which emphasises the descriptive nature of qualitative research

On reflection, it was decided that quantitative or mixed-methods approaches would not, due to their deductive, statistical and correlational focus (Opoku, Ahmed and Akotia (2016)), be as advantageous or beneficial for the research when compared to a more interpretive analysis. This better suit the more emic and inductive aspects of the research. It is noteworthy, however, that quantitative studies undoubtedly featured in the review of the literature, which provided many interesting and valuable statistics and findings. It is in the deeper level of knowledge, the perceptions and attitudes, that I wanted to derive the findings in this study. It was, therefore, Miles, Huberman and Saldana's (2014) succinct explanation of qualitative research as "a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts" (p.1), that resonated and integrated well with the knowledge gap in which this study will locate

itself, and my own interpretivist/constructivist philosophical stance. How this positionality relates to this stance and the research undertaken will now be discussed.

5.5 Positionality:

It must be acknowledged that not only will the philosophical underpinnings of the research have implications in reference to the participants, but also in relation to my own positionality as researcher. According to Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013), this "...reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study" (p.71). Savin-Baden and Howell Major also assert that positionality is generally recognised through the location of the researcher in relation to three key areas: the subject of the research, the participants involved and the research context and process (p.71). This suggests the great significance that is assigned to the researcher and their positionality in a study, which is reaffirmed by Denzin's (1986) claim that "Interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher" (p.12). The importance of this positionality is also expressed by Savin-Baden and Howell Major who assert that "…it is important for researchers to understand themselves and their stances, so that they come to know the ways in which stances influence the research lens adopted" (p.82).

At this point, therefore, it would be prudent to disclose my own educational background, in order to ensure the transparency of any potential values or indeed, biases (Cresswell, 2003). I have been a primary teacher for the past eighteen years, with background knowledge, expertise and experience in the area of primary MFLs, including being Regional Advisor with the MLPSI. Given that the topic of primary MFLs is the main research focus of this thesis, it is of paramount importance for me to acknowledge my own positionality, and demonstrate my own reflexivity during my research journey and repeatedly reflect upon how these aspects influence and shape my research (Hopkins, 2007). My career thus far will have had some influence on my own values, and may indeed have an influence on my own world view, which it must be admitted, could have an impact on the research process itself. Such a situation meant that I, as researcher, would have to be completely aware of any potential (un)intended bias that may be involved when designing and forming the research methodology for this study.

5.6 The Research Instruments

5.6.1 The Qualitative Survey as a Research Instrument:

If one is to take Groves et al.'s (2004) definition of a survey as "a systematic method for gathering information from [a sample of] entities for the purpose of constructing quantitative descriptors of the attributes of the larger population of which the entities are members" (p.4), the keyword is *quantitative*. While a 'systematic method' was what I needed, a research instrument was not going to furnish me with the appropriate data. More research on the choice between the two types of survey was needed, to compare a statistical/quantitative survey with a more open-ended style of qualitative survey.

Ultimately however, the choice of a qualitative survey was made for a variety of reasons. Firstly, according to Braun et al. (2020), qualitative surveys gather "what is important to participants, and access their language and terminology – both frequently claimed advantages of qualitative research" (p.1). Additionally, the instrument was selected on the grounds that it "does not aim at establishing frequencies, means or other parameters but at determining the diversity of some topic of interest within a given population" (Jansen, 2010, p. 2). It is important to note however that frequencies will be used in order to determine the degree of diversity of the participant population, e.g., the percentage of participants from DEIS schools (Delivering Equality in Schools programme), as well as the judgements of participants as to when a MFL should be introduced (if at all), in the primary school. It was, however, Braun et al.'s key (2020) assertion that confirmed its selection:

> A key advantage of online qualitative surveys is openness and flexibility to address a wide range of research questions of interest to social researchers, as the method allows access to data that range in focus from peoples' views, experiences, or material practices, through to representational or meaning-making practices. (p.2)

5.6.1.1 Limitations of the Survey as Research Instrument:

While it has been acknowledged that there are certain advantages to using any research instrument, the qualitative survey, as with all instruments, has its limitations. In theory, the idea of a "qualitative survey" is not readily conducive to traditional research paradigms. Atieno (2009), for example, attaches a lack of statistical significance and certainty as key limitations to qualitative research in general, which could arguably be correlational to qualitative surveys.

Such correlational attributes are the only obvious limitations discussed by social research experts, since, on careful examination of a variety of manuals on social research methodology, qualitative surveys are almost non-existent (Alasuutari, Bickman and Brennan, 2008; Creswell, 2014; Seale et al., 2004). An alternative and common criticism of qualitative surveys is that the data may not be as rich as that of interviews (Braun et al., 2020). However, triangulating the data from the qualitative surveys with that of the focus groups, will ensure this limitation is moot and the depth of the data is more assured.

It would be pertinent to advance past this distinct dearth of analysis of qualitative surveys as a research instrument, with emphasis on one of the key elements of this study being the fact that multiple methods were used. Babbie (2007) asserts that "the best study design uses more than one research method" (p.110). As a result of using both a qualitative survey and focus groups, the data generated has essentially given the researcher more confidence in the validity and rigour of the study. Following on from this discussion on the merits and uses of a qualitative survey as a research instrument, it is now pertinent to present the case for focus groups.

5.6.2 Focus Groups as a Research Instrument:

With regards to the literature on the chosen research topic, the use of focus groups is not necessarily something that is widely reported, but when it is, it has given some interesting findings (for example: Cable et al., 2010; Dillon, 2011; Macrory and McLachlan, 2009; Fisher, 2007). These studies generally used one type of homogenous focus group to inform their research; for example, focus groups with parents, focus groups with trainee teachers etc. My research had a mix of homogenous focus groups in order to gain as much feedback from various stakeholders as possible. As with all research, the pilot focus group, as well as the main research, were guided by what Lane et al. (2001) describe as core principles of qualitative research: truthfulness, applicability, consistency and confirmability. These principles improved the rigour of the research.

On reading numerous experts in the field of educational research, it was Greenbaum's (1993) assertions that attracted me to focus groups as a method for my own research. It is Greenbaum's belief that focus groups are most effective and, indeed, yield most useful and interesting results when they are used to determine information and opinions on new proposals or initiatives, or evaluate the success or failure of a particular initiative. This resonated greatly with me, especially given both my primary and secondary research questions.

With PMFLs being a potential new proposal for many, and, for some, a former initiative, the garnering of opinions, (analytical, predictive, comparative and evaluative) would prove valuable. Additionally, Morgan's (1996) point that in focus groups, a key advantage is that participants "both query each other and explain themselves to each other" (p.139). This was affirmed by Morgan and Krueger (1993), in their assertion that focus group interaction therefore offers considerably rich data as to what extent consensus and diversity exists among the participants.

In terms of the number of focus groups, Krueger and Casey's (2000) guidance was especially important, recommending that focus groups be conducted until the point of theoretical saturation—the point at which no new insights were being gained. The number of groups needed to reach saturation can vary, according to Krueger and Casey, but usually the researcher will plan for three or four focus groups with a particular type of participant and decide if adequate saturation has been reached or if additional groups should be conducted. In this case, two focus groups for teachers and two for principals were sufficient in order to reach the point of data saturation.

5.6.2.1 Limitations of Focus Groups as a Research Instrument:

It is important to note, however, that focus groups are not designed to provide all things to all researchers (Kreuger, 1988). Focus groups do not either constitute a perfect method, or necessarily yield perfect results. Focus groups do not provide statistical projections, for example, nor do they generate a consensus on a given topic, resolve any potential personnel issues, or change attitudes of participants (Glitz, 1998; Krueger & Casey, 2000). I am also aware that any interview situation, however open, puts a constraint on the respondent or subject (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). To see the respondent as a co-constructor is unduly optimistic; he or she is responding to the agenda set by the interviewer and might wish to give the kinds of answers that will satisfy the interviewer. The respondent is involved in a process of anticipation and interpretation, supplying the interviewer with the information they think the interviewer wants to hear.

What focus groups can do, is generate ideas, give a deeper understanding of, and new insights into, the research topic, while also allowing opinions and attitudes to be socially formed and articulated (Breen, 2006). Breen highlights this social element when comparing the focus group favourably against other one-to-one interview techniques: "The key difference between one-to-

one interviews and focus-group discussions is that the latter is far more appropriate for the generation of new ideas formed within a social context" (Breen, 2006 p.466). Such a key point demonstrates a significant aspect of the focus group from a constructivist and interpretivist perspective and is crucial for my own research to generate insightful findings in relation to my research questions.

Generalizability is another important point to discuss in relation to focus groups, as it was a genuine limitation in both the pilot and in the main research. That said, Vaughan et al. (1996) have asserted that generalizability is seldom the stated aim of focus group interviews and that it is the goal of follow-up research designs to establish generalizability. According to Vaughan et al., because "…samples for focus groups are rarely randomly selected, it is not possible to make inferences from the data to a larger population" (p.60). However, this could be construed as slightly disingenuous. Yin (1989) points out that replication logic could apply to multiple focus groups, which did apply to a certain extent in this study. Generalizability could exist, therefore, with multiple focus groups ultimately having similar findings. In order to ensure that the procedure and method are both systematic and recursive, the focus group element of the research was an iterative process which drew upon foundations of social constructionism. While each focus group had different types of participants, the structure was the same for all. The focus group sessions were divided into two distinct parts:

1. The first part featured a scenario-based task for the group relating directly to the research question.
2. The second part was in an interview format highlighting unanswered key questions from the first task.

5.7 Shaping the Research Method:

The research conducted was primarily interpretivist with some features of constructivism. It also echoed Gergen's (1985) principles of social constructionism, suggesting, essentially, that our own world views are merely social inventions. Initially entering the academic lexicon through Berger and Luckman (1966), social constructionism has been described as "a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge; historical and cultural specificity; a belief that knowledge is sustained by social processes; and a belief that knowledge and social action go together" (Mutch, 2006, p. 185). Essentially, a central tenet of social constructionism, according

to Gergen, is the fact that social and interpersonal influences shape and form human life (Gergen, 1985, p. 265) and that the focus is not necessarily on the individual person, but on the language generated through social interactions (Gergen and Gergen, 1991). Additionally, it is worth noting that the social constructionist paradigm proposes an epistemological stance in which the researcher should look beyond the gathering of facts to calculate frequencies and statistics in order to truly value what participants demonstrate about their own constructed realities (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). It is in this polyvocality that one of the key criticisms of social constructionism develops. Hammersley (1992) calls into question the validity of the generated data as a result of the multiple voices and opinions that can each claim its own legitimacy. However, it is a combination of these influences, along with the complexities of the human experience, that was appealing for this study and the qualitative methods selected.

In relation to how social constructionism can relate to the research methods of this study, we can see how Stake (2000) supports the use of qualitative research methods in order to explore the understanding of relationships, which would also demonstrate how people comprehend their own social realities. Echoing Gergen's (1985) opinion, the study emphasised "…explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live" (p. 266). We can advance this point further, taking Cisneros-Puebla's (2007) assertion that meanings and realities are constructed by both the research participants, and indeed the researcher, within their interactions. As a result, there is a crucial point for me as researcher to keep in mind: "that the role of the researcher needs to become transparent in both data collection and subsequent analysis" (Losantos et al, 2006, p.30). It was envisaged that these contentions would be demonstrated in both research instruments, the qualitative survey and the focus groups, but ultimately this became more explicit in the latter, where the principles of social constructionism came to the fore through an initial scenario-based task to show how participants, as a group, negotiated reality (Berger and Luckman, 1966).

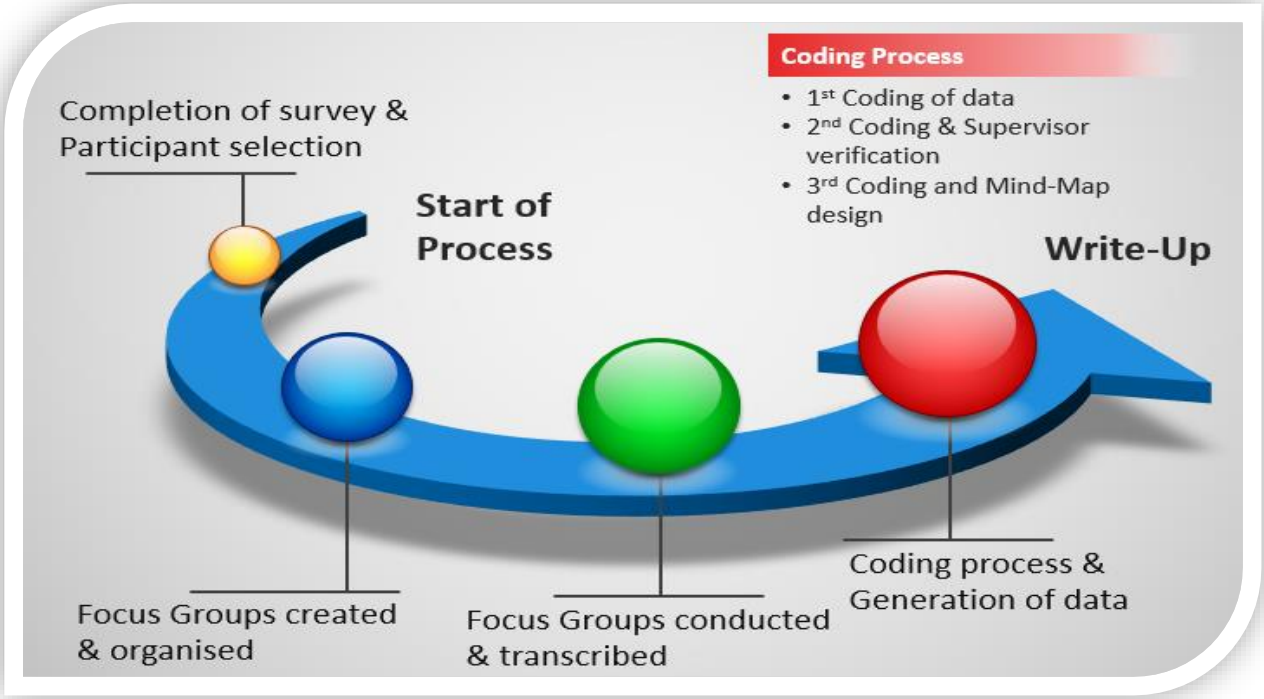
This research is certainly not perfect and indeed it is crucial to concede the potential issues:

- It is a relatively small-scale study, with 130 participants
- There is a potential argument against any generalizability
- The limited grand claims that could be made (Thomas, 2017)

Despite the above, the findings still give reasonable insights with regards to the potential for PMFLs, recognising both the prospective benefits and challenges to its implementation. The research has wide-ranging relevance for a variety of beneficiary groups including academic researchers and teacher-trainers in the area of MFL teaching, both primary and secondary teachers and principals, as well as policymakers within the Department of Education and Skills. Additionally, with the status of MFL teaching and learning across Europe, the research beneficiaries could be located across the continent. With all these points in mind, it would be appropriate at this stage to outline the steps which were taken in order to complete this study.

The study took place in five steps from pilot to focus groups (see Figure 13). Before these stages of the research are discussed in more detail, the pilot study will be presented.

Figure 13: Steps in the Main Research Study



5.7.1 The Pilot Phase:

Before carrying out the main study, advice given by Judith Bell (2014) was adopted. What Bell suggests is the importance of reliability in the study, and how vital the piloting of the research instrument(s) is in this regard. In this case, prior to the study taking place, a two-part pilot was

planned and distributed. The first element was the pilot qualitative survey, and the second was a pilot focus group.

After an initial draft of the qualitative survey was edited in consultation with my supervisor, it was circulated to a small-scale sample of teachers (<10) in January 2019, to ascertain the type of responses and their quality in terms of data generation. The teachers, who fitted the demographic of the research, were informed about the research and completed the survey, with a view to giving authentic, constructive feedback. They were not going to take part in the research themselves. These teachers were then asked a selection of questions to ascertain the suitability of the research instrument (as recommended by Bell, 2005), and these responses, combined with my own evaluation of the richness of the data, determined the readiness to move into the research phase:

1. How long did it take you to complete?
2. Were the instructions clear?
3. Were any of the questions unclear or ambiguous? If so, will you say which and why?
4. Did you object to answering any of the questions?
5. In your opinion, has any major topic been omitted?
6. Was the layout of the questionnaire clear/attractive?
7. Any comments?

   (From Bell, (2005) p.148).

The responses from the pilot participants to the pilot survey were mostly positive, with some constructive and informative comments. At this point, the pilot survey took approximately five to ten minutes to complete, as anticipated, and the open-ended questions yielded some interesting and rich data, which were ultimately coded along with focus group data. As a result, no significant edits were necessary and only slight semantic changes were made to one question within the survey.

The pilot focus group took place on 25th April 2018 and participants were chosen for a variety of practical and pragmatic reasons: organisational, geographical, time-constraints, experience and with due regard to the potential findings. Due to the time constraints of the pilot, a realistic view to sampling and data collection was needed. As a result, this pilot focus group used a convenience sample of four teachers (including two teaching principals) in County Mayo, who

were known to the researcher in a professional capacity (see Table 2 for information). This sampling was relatively easy to organise and did not require any Garda vetting or clearance, as all participants were adults. In addition, if it came to needing any clarifications or re-interviewing, it would be more feasible given that their proximity to the researcher and each other was reasonable. A binary decision was taken that the pilot participants would either have been involved with the MLPSI or not. Since using teachers that have been involved with the MLPSI in this pilot would rule them out of the main research and given that there is a relatively small sample of these teachers anyway, the decision was made to do the latter. It was also predicted that having a mix of teacher profiles could further enrich the data, broadening the evidentiary base and providing key insights from a variety of contexts. This included teachers with and without experience of teaching a MFL. Additionally, for simplicity, coded pseudonyms (e.g., PT1) were selected for the participants, rather than names. All participants had received some prior information about the theme of the focus group and consent forms were signed by all participants.

Table 2: Participants in the Pilot Focus Group

Research pseudonym	Teacher Profile	Gender	Involved in the MLPSI
PT1	Teaching Principal	F	X
PT2	Mainstream Teacher	F	X
PT3	Support Teacher	F	X
PT4	Teaching Principal	M	X

5.7.2 Coding Data and Identifying Themes

The pilot focus group output was transcribed and combined with the data from the pilot qualitative survey. Braun and Clarke's (2016) Six Steps to Thematic Analysis and Nvivo software were used to properly analyse the raw data. Owing to its effectiveness and relative practicability, this procedure was maintained in the main research itself and a more in-depth discussion on the method will be presented later in this chapter. During the iterative Nvivo coding process for the pilot, the raw data produced a broad variety of 28 codes, from which numerous themes became apparent. After 2nd coding the data, it was apparent that there was

considerable overlapping and some of the codes and several of the themes were combined within more all-encompassing categories. Figure 14 shows some examples of this evolutionary process, while Figure 15 demonstrates the thematic concept map of how the themes related to each other:

Figure 14: Initial Codes and Themes from Pilot Stage

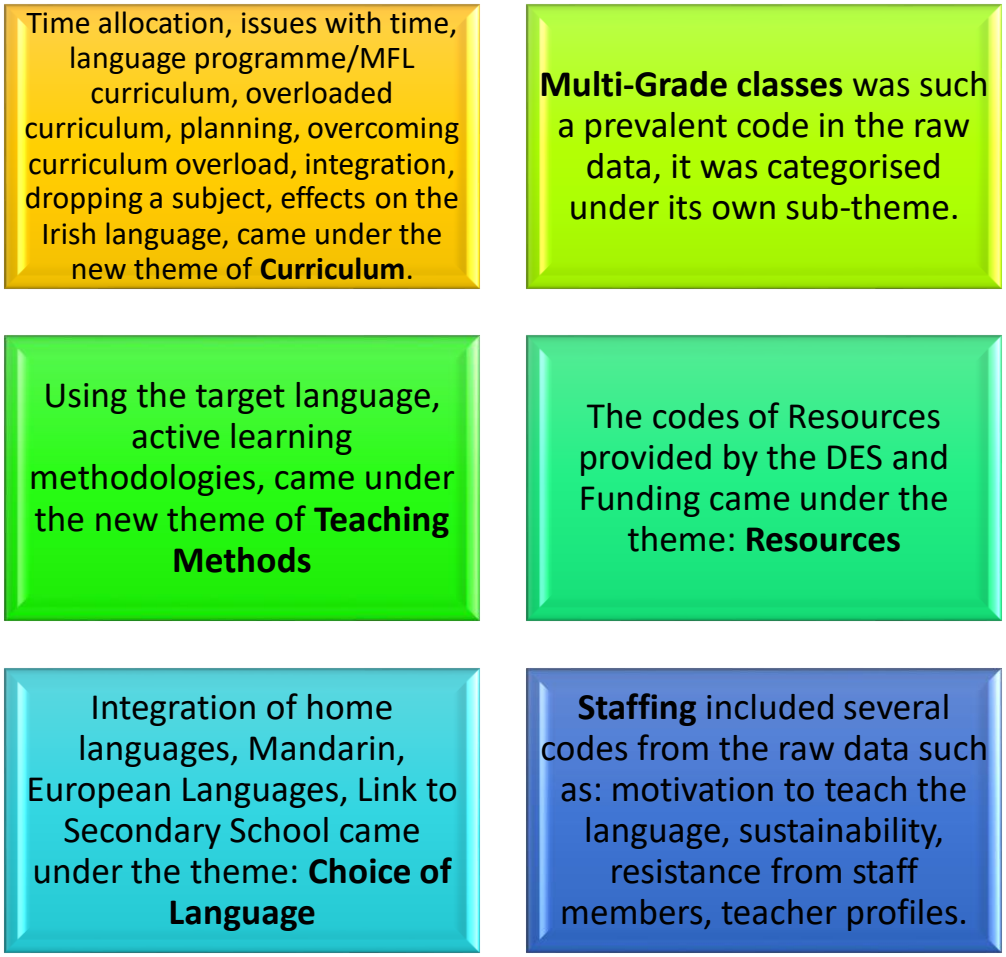
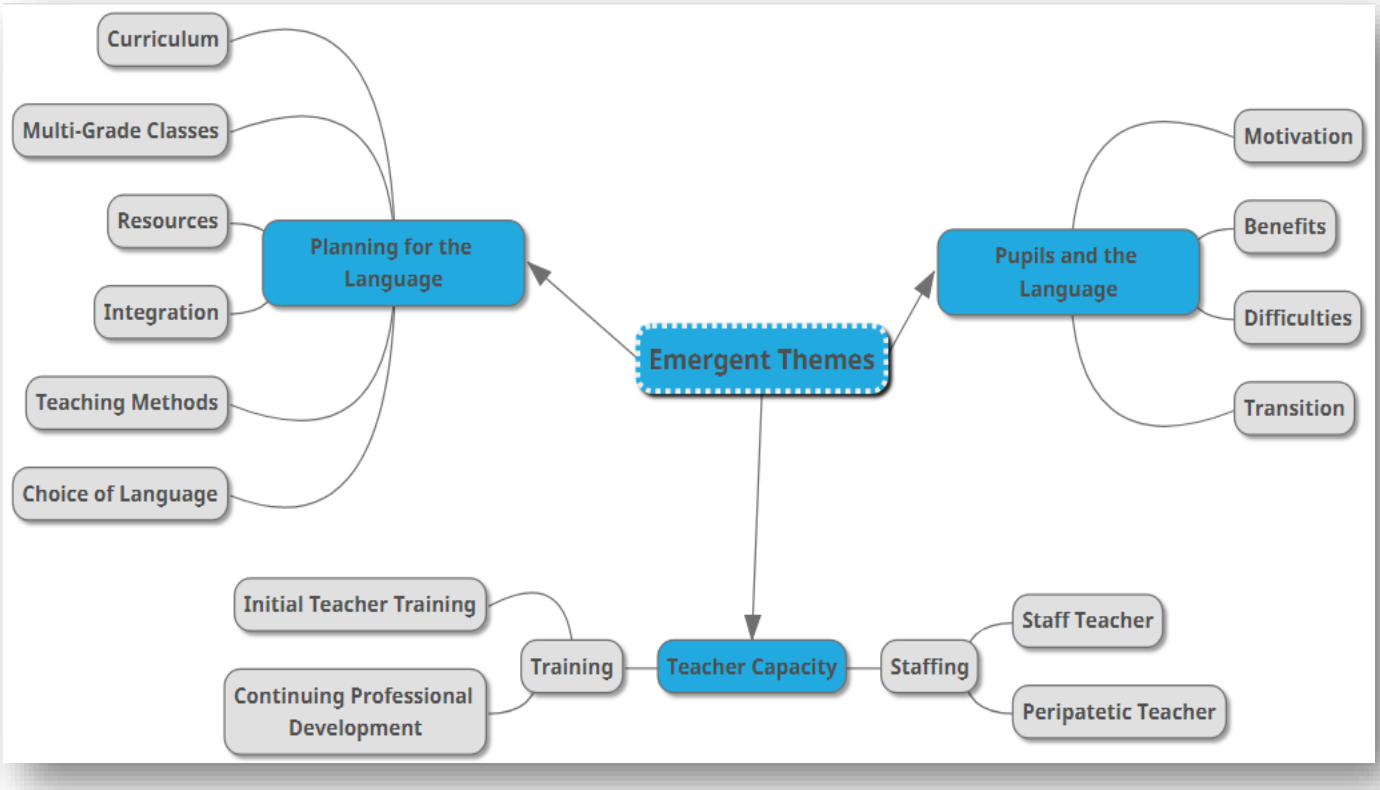


Figure 15: Thematic Concept Map of Emergent Themes and Sub-themes from the Pilot



It was interesting to see the evolution of the research over time, and the comparisons between the implementation of the pilot. The raw data generated, and the initial skills developed, were significantly different to the central study itself as will be evident in the next section of this chapter.

5.8 The Research Phase

5.8.1 The Participant Sample:

On reading a variety of experts in the area of research methods, such as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and Limb and Dwyer (2001), it became increasingly apparent that the use of correct sampling methods in qualitative research can bring about the occurrence of unique and effective experiences, where important, irreplaceable and interactional social knowledge can be produced. Taking the advice of Noy (2008), I used a purposive sample for both the pilot and the main study and on advice from my tutor, excluded the pilot participants from any further involvement in the research, save for potentially circulating the survey among their school staffs. The initial responses were of a high quality and confirmed that the survey would yield rich and informative data.

Determining the number of participants in the sample, advice was taken from several sources, including Miles and Huberman (1994), Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2007), Lincoln and Guba (1994) and Marhsall (1996), who asserts that "An appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question" (p.523). In terms of sample numbers, the initial theory was a minimum of 40 Primary Teachers, 30 Primary Principals, 20 Primary Pupils from 6th Class (the final year of primary school), and 20 Secondary School Students in 3rd Year (the year in which they will undertake the Junior Certificate State Examination). In practice however, the number of participants that was required only became more obvious as the research progressed and data saturation was achieved in the qualitative survey, when new themes or explanations stopped emerging from the raw data.

Participant recruitment began with an initial convenience sample (ICS) (Miles and Huberman, 1994) of primary school teachers that featured participants from a wide variety of teaching experience, including those who had/had not taught MFLs. According to Dörnyei (2007), convenience sampling is essentially a form of nonprobability sampling where certain practical criteria determine the participant population, for example, ease of access, location and availability. In this case, advice conveyed by S.K. and Given (2008) was heeded in selecting this sampling method as it would enable ease of access to the participant population. The ICS then gave rise to an exponential, non-discriminative snowball sample of participants, which yielded the requisite number of participants.

Noy (2008) refers to the snowball sampling technique as one "…captured in a metaphor that touches on the central quality of this sampling procedure: its accumulative (diachronic and dynamic) dimension" (p.330). Such an eloquent description relates very readily to this research. In this study, a list of first subjects was drawn up from teaching acquaintances known to the researcher, these acquaintances were subsequently recruited to the sample group providing multiple referrals, either directly to the researcher or their personal referral. Each new referral was explored until primary data from a sufficient number of samples was collected. The data saturation point was achieved among teachers and principals when, 75 primary teachers and 33 primary principals (15 primary administrative principals, 18 primary teaching principals) had responded. Any initial contacts that had a close friendship with the researcher, were precluded from taking part in the study. However, in the snowball sample, (Miles and Huberman, 1994) some were employed to circulate the initial qualitative surveys among all staff members (not just

like-minded colleagues), of their schools on my behalf, or suggested other potential participants. Additionally, 20 primary 6th class pupils and 20 3rd year secondary school students were recruited through teachers that were known to the researcher. These teachers enabled me to contact their principals in order to ask for permission to recruit participants from their schools.

It was crucial to get a representative sample of views, rather than people who agree with each other, as such a sample would undermine the study. With regards to recruitment of pupils, two primary and two secondary schools were chosen from varying situations, rural/urban with the intention of ten 6th class pupils from each of two primary schools and ten 3rd year students from each of two secondary schools (one school from each sector included an eleventh participant). The principals of each school acted *in loco parentis* to give permission for the survey to be completed in their schools, and then circulated the online surveys to the students. Initial approaches were made to the schools, again, on a convenience sampling basis. A total of 42 pupils/students completed the survey from 42 circulated. In terms of the pupils and students that completed the survey, the specific details of the schools are confidential, however the general background of the schools is presented in Table 3.

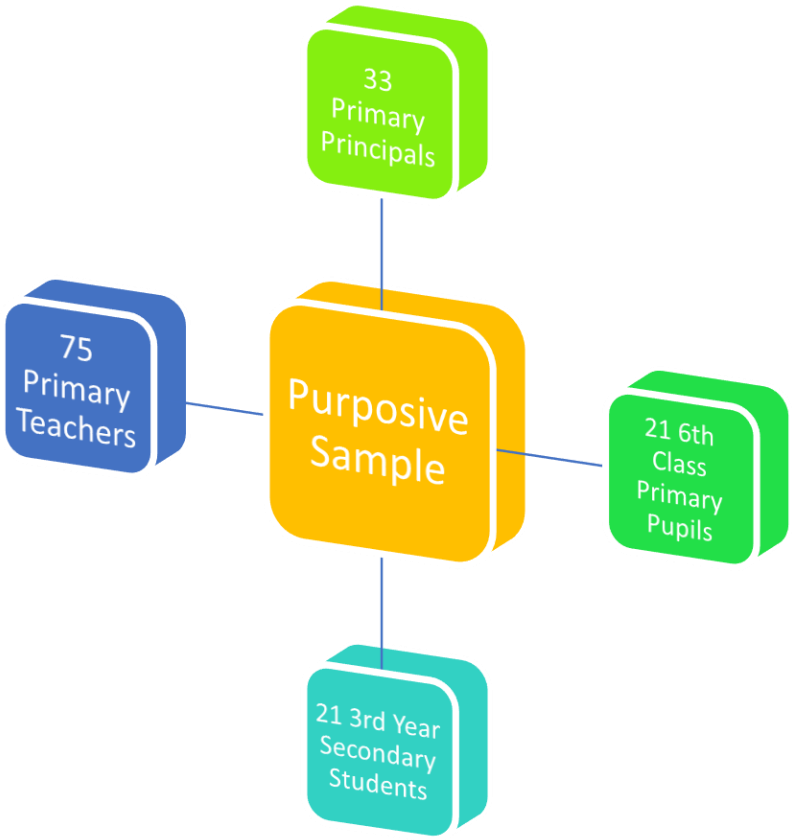
Table 3: The Four Schools Participating in the Pupils/Students Qualitative Surveys

School Code	**School Background**
P1	Small, rural primary school, *Gaeltacht* (Irish-Speaking), multi-grade
P2	Medium-sized (>200) urban primary school, DEIS (Designated disadvantaged), single-stream
S1	Medium-sized (>400) mixed rural/urban secondary school, DEIS (Designated disadvantaged)
S2	Medium-sized (>400) rural secondary school

At a minimum, this sampling (see Figure 16) harvested a variety of principals, teachers and pupils from a broad range of schools, including those designated disadvantaged (DEIS), rural, urban, and Gaelscoileanna (Irish-speaking schools). The ICS of teachers was a mix of former MLPSI and non-MLPSI teachers and principals. It is also important that there is clarity regarding the further selection of participants, as it was emphasised to the ICS that there would not be any prerequisite skillset, experiences or characteristics required for inclusion in the snowball sample. It must be added however, that in order to have a sample of participants with MFL teaching experience, part of the data saturation point was the emergence of a reasonable percentage (10%) of teachers/principals with this characteristic.

It is important to note that the findings are based on data from relatively small samples of teachers, principals, 6th class pupils and 3rd year students. However, the sample was derived from a broad profile of school situations. As a result, generalizability to a broader sample is not guaranteed. It is also important to point out that although all of the participants were recruited from an initial convenience sample, this was done after considerable research into focus groups (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990; Ashworth and Lucas, 2000; Thomas, 2017). Moreover, as attested by Atieno (2009), there is a lack of statistical significance and certainty with qualitative research in general, which could correlate with qualitative surveys.

Figure 16: The Sample for the study



In terms of the recruitment process for the focus groups, on completion of the initial qualitative survey (teachers and principals only), participants were invited to 'opt-in' to the focus groups stage. On collation of the surveys, the creation of focus groups stemmed from a purposive, geographical sampling (Alvi, 2016), giving rise to a clustering of participants based on their geographical location, to ensure ease of travel for participants. The focus groups were homogenous (Krueger & Casey, 2000), in so far as all participants were either teachers or principals. There was not a mix of groups, save for the obvious fact that all principals are also trained teachers. Such a decision was made following observations from the pilot focus group, where it was apparent there was an element of prestige bias, combining with slightly altered behaviours among participants.

Two focus groups were established for teachers and two for principals to have the sample more representative. Each focus group had a maximum of five members. The number was selected to have sufficient participants to provide diversity of perceptions, but not too many to prevent all from participating (Krueger and Casey, 2009). Recruitment was subsequently consolidated using national representative gender statistics as a guide (at present 87% female, Murray (2016)), and every effort was made to ensure a non-biased sample, including a selection review by an academic colleague. In the make-up of the total educator sample, the gender proportions were 23/108 males, with 85/108 females. The participants in the focus groups came from a wide variety of educational and professional backgrounds, with participants' teaching experience ranging from 2 to 35+ years. They were working in small, two-teacher rural schools, medium-sized rural and urban schools, DEIS schools, *Gaelscoileanna* (Irish-speaking schools) and large, urban schools. Three of the four groups had at least one participant with experience of the MLPSI. There were also two participants who, according to their survey data, were opposed to the introduction of PMFLs. It was agreed that confidentiality, meant no specific, easily identifiable details of any focus group participant, would be used in this thesis. Four focus groups were conducted: two focus groups for primary teachers and two for primary principals, the general summary detail of which is provided in Table 4.

The fundamental aim of the focus groups was to gather more specific data on the research questions to enhance and build on data gathered from the qualitative surveys. The focus group process was iterative, ensuring a systematic and recursive method and this will be discussed after the next section which will discuss the design of the qualitative surveys.

Table 4: Information on Focus Group Participants

Principal Code	Gender	School Background	Teaching Principal /Administrative Principal	MLPSI
PA	M	Large Urban Primary	Administrative	Y
PB	M	Large Rural/Urban	Administrative	Y
PC	F	Small Rural	Teaching	Y
PD	F	Small Rural	Teaching	Y
PE	F	Small Rural, Educate Together	Teaching	N
PF	F	Small Rural	Teaching	N
PG	M	Large Rural/Urban	Administrative	N
PH	F	Small Rural	Teaching	N

Teacher Code	Gender	School Background	MLPSI
TA	M	Large Urban, *Gaelscoil*	Y
TB	M	Large Urban	N
TC	M	Large Urban	N
TD	F	Large Urban	N
TE	F	Small Rural	Y
TF	F	Large Rural	N
TG	F	Large Rural	Y
TH	F	Small Rural	N

PARTICIPANT TOTALS:	
Male	6
Female	10
MLPSI	7
Large School	9
Small School	7

5.8.2 Developing the Qualitative Survey

The use of a qualitative survey linked effectively with my constructivist research and affirmed Bryman's (1988) assertion that there is no definitive alignment between methods and particular paradigms. It is also important to note that Guba and Lincoln (1994) echo such a theory, as they argue that regardless of the positivist/post-positivist leanings of a survey there are still many opportunities for its use in either critical theory or constructivist research. It is worth noting that pupil participants were presented with a different survey from the other participants. Two different surveys were sent to the pupil and student groups. The primary 6th class pupils had four closed (demographic) questions and four open-ended questions, while the secondary level 3rd year students had seven closed questions and five open-ended questions. No identifiable details were garnered from either survey.

In terms of the types of questions, (Appendix 2), it is important to note that there was a very small, quantitative element at the beginning of the survey, which included some initial demographic questions, as advocated by Hughes, Camden and Yangchen (2016), however this quantitative element was by no means the main approach of the research. These initial factually informative, questions were multiple-choice/closed in order to ascertain clear data, such as, non/DEIS school, location in Ireland, preference for when MFL learning should begin (if ever). The main questions in the survey however, that yielded the richest data, were open-ended questions with text boxes for completion. Taking on board advice from Braun and Clarke (2013), the core questions of the survey were open, short and unambiguous. Using this form of questioning, gave the freedom to respondents to provide their own, unique answers to the questions, rather than simply select from a list of predetermined responses (Singer and Couper, 2017). This approach gave participants the autonomy to express both their opinions and feelings about the topic(s) featured, generating some rich and potentially unexpected results. Using the instrument in this way can ultimately, according to Moser and Kalton (1971), give the researcher some reassurance that the maximum of relevant issues will be covered.

The choice of research instrument merged conveniently with my constructivist study, offering more detailed and nuanced data than a quantitative equivalent, which would have been embedded in a statistical and correlational paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1994) affirm such a stance, asserting that despite the positivist/post-positivist propensities of a survey, many opportunities exist for using one in constructivist research. There was an initial selection of

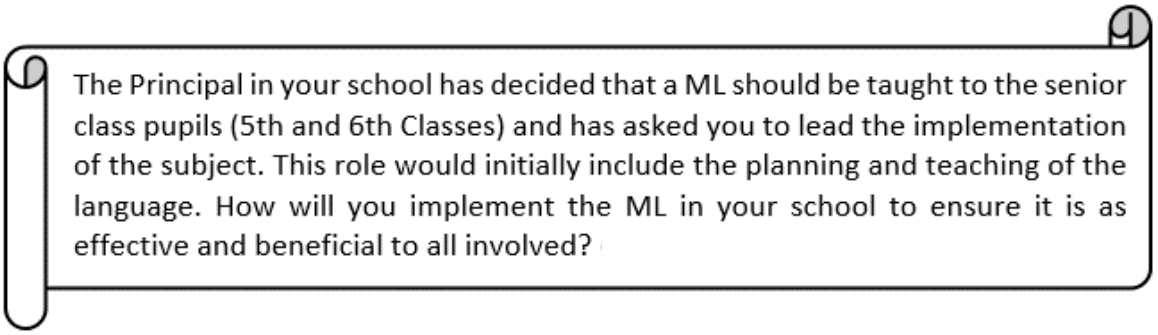
twenty potential questions for inclusion in the survey. This list was subsequently reviewed and revised based on the research questions themselves, with adjustments made to the wording, and the exclusion of questions which were either too broad or too narrow (e.g., "What advice would you give to the Minister for Education and Skills on implementing modern foreign languages in primary school?"). Being aware of the amount of time that a survey could take for a participant to complete, also influenced the questions that were included and after consulting with my supervisor, I decided to focus on a set of closed questions, e.g., "When do you believe a modern language should be implemented at primary level?" and Additionally, there were open-ended questions to identify perceived benefits of early language learning, perceived challenges to the implementation of PMFLs and the perceived ways to overcome these challenges. The wording of these foci was adapted for inclusion in all three surveys (teachers/principals, 6th class pupils and 3rd year students, see Appendix 3 and 4).

5.8.3 Designing and Conducting the Focus Groups

In terms of the structure of the pilot focus groups, there were few changes made between the pilot and the research itself and much of the pilot interview schedule was included in some form. However, some slight changes were made to the task-based scenario and some of the questions. Developing a final interview schedule was a vital aspect of the planning for the focus groups, in essence, setting out the discussion agenda (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). Both the primary and secondary research questions as discussed earlier in this chapter, determined the direction of the schedule, allowing me, as researcher, to identify how the most informative data could be garnered (see Appendix 5 for the Interview Schedule). Importantly, the schedule was semi-structured, allowing for a degree of flexibility to allow for new points and information to be noted and followed up on, when the need arose (Thomas, 2017).

In both the pilot focus group and subsequent focus groups, after the initial welcome and 'small-talk' with the participants, a scenario-based task (or a variation thereof) (Figure 17) was given to the group with minimum interaction with myself until its conclusion; either by the completion of the task, or, in the judgement of myself as moderator/researcher, the task was no longer useful through data saturation, or where no new data was generated.

Figure 17: Example of Scenario-Based Task for the Teacher Focus Groups



All phases of each focus group were conducted in an iterative way. There was an audio recording which was transcribed, and additional written notes were maintained, relating to the topics of the interview with any issues and/or new ideas noted. After transcription, all audio files were deleted in order to ensure anonymity of the participants. In the short interview section of the focus group, any remaining unanswered questions were followed up on. After reviewing Stewart and Shamdasani's (1990) thoughts on the types of questions to ask, it was decided that dichotomous questions would not be used as possible, with open-ended questions being at the forefront of the interview. The interview schedule was a continuum of questions moving from the general to the more specific.

In my own research journal, I kept observational notes on the pilot study which resulted in the interview schedule and structure remaining the same throughout. Interesting interactions, ideas and opinions came through in the pilot and indeed in the core focus groups of the study. I noted, during the pilot, that I felt the principals within the focus group 'held back' in their participation and the opinions they put forward. I felt at the time, that this may have been because of the mix of both principals and teachers within the group. Homogeneity, might have allowed some freedom to convey and produce richer data. Additionally, I also noted my challenge in remaining completely impartial in the focus groups. I reflected greatly on this point. As moderator, I needed to introduce the topic to the participants in the focus group, and subsequently ask useful, lucid, probing and pertinent questions after the scenario-based task, without which, the focus group would surely become 'rudderless' (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000).

In relation to the subsequent interview part of the focus group, certainly the semi-structured element aided the flow of the session. Having the issues move from the general to the specific worked. I think that using the schedule more as an *aide-memoire* was of benefit, but also, the

use of more probes from my point of view yielded more worthwhile data in the focus groups, rather than the pilot. I feel that the issues/topics on the interview schedule were reasonably sufficient, however what did change from the pilot to the actual focus groups, was that the focus was on more than just the obstacles and challenges to MFL implementation. This included multi-grade classes and the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs, both of which became apparent, if not elaborated upon, in the pilot, but I probed deeper when needed, in the focus groups. Deriving more information from participants on how these obstacles can be overcome from their point of view, was of paramount importance for the main research.

In all the groups, the scenario-based task generated considerable data and allowed the advantages and disadvantages of the PMFL implementation to be discussed in a natural way, regardless of their background or linguistic aptitudes. The participants seemed to be very much at ease in each other's company and certainly gave the impression of collegiality, honesty and openness. In the pilot, I had noted an element of prestige bias, in addition to a certain withholding of opinions. These features were not obvious in the focus groups. The participants applied their own life and professional experience to the scenario, and this added to the value of the data. At times, when questions were asked within the scenario that none of the participants could answer, it was left to me to give an indicator, for example, whether a curriculum already existed for primary MFLs. I would momentarily interject to answer in the affirmative. I had considered changes in the wording of the task-based scenario to best scaffold the teachers, especially non-MLPSI teachers, through the process without the need for moderator intervention. However, I decided against them on the grounds of it being an over-provision of initial information.

It is important to note that just four focus groups were conducted, because data saturation was achieved (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). If data saturation had not been achieved, other focus groups may have been conducted.

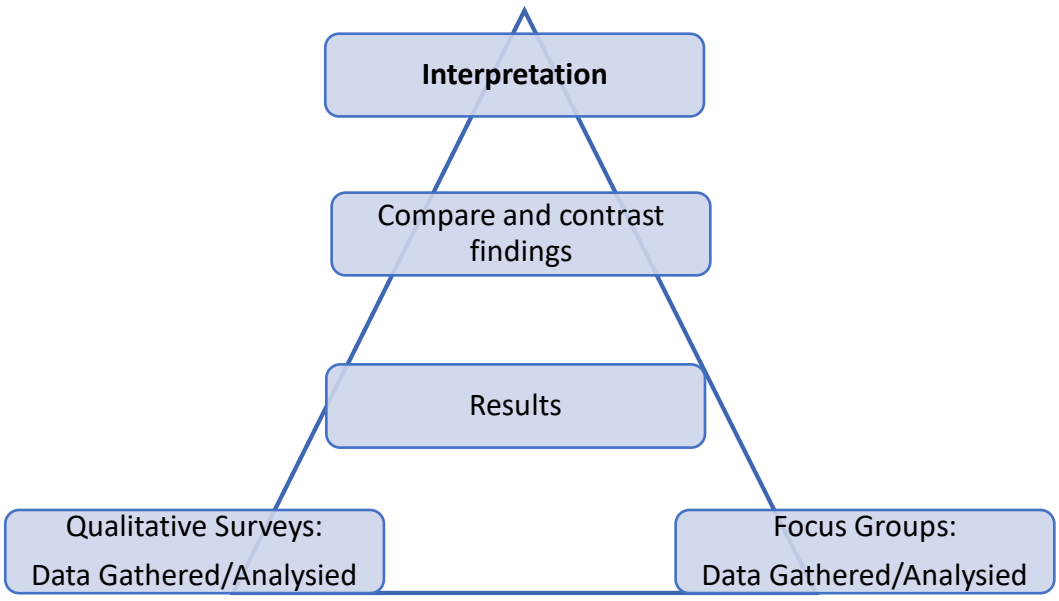
5.9 Triangulation of Methods:

Cohen, Mannion and Morrison define triangulation as the "…use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour" (2000, p.112). Triangulation and the concept of methodological pluralism has found itself to be discussed in numerous sources (Carter, 2003; Danermark, 2002). Promoted by Bell and Newby (1977), the concept rejected the notion that any specific method was automatically better than another. May,

Hunter and Jason (2016) develop this further by defining methodological pluralism as a concept that involves "finding value in a variety of sources of information (p.1). In this study, such a belief has come to the fore and the effective triangulation of the two research methods, the qualitative surveys and focus groups, also known as 'methodological triangulation' (Denzin, 1970) was vital.

The triangulation technique employed in this research facilitates understanding from a multiple perspective, ensuring that the data is rich and the findings robust (Yin, 2009). A synthesis of methods provides an advantage when conducting research for policy evidence. In the context of this thesis, discourse analysis introduces the researcher to multiple understandings of the themes. Both Patton (1999) and Borg et al. (1993), describe this key element of research as the combination of several methods or data sources in qualitative research with the intention of developing a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The triangulation of perceptions garnered from this study should provide a worthwhile contribution to the research findings (see Figure 18) in relation to the primary research question.

Figure 18: Triangulation of Methods



Source: adapted from Creswell (2012)

The key objectives of the triangulation are:

- To identify the perceived benefits of, and barriers to, implementing a primary MFLs programme in the Irish primary school curriculum.
- To identify and examine the potential ways to overcome such barriers within the constraints of the Irish primary school system.

5.10 Analysing the Data:

In order to make the most of the raw data from both the qualitative surveys and the focus groups, it was decided that thematic analysis would be used. There are several reasons for its selection. Firstly, thematic analysis aligns appropriately with the interpretivist and constructionist paradigms of the pilot and subsequent larger-scale study (Crotty, 1998; Cohen and Manion, 1994). Furthermore, the process itself would enable the researcher to identify and analyse any recurring themes and patterns from the transcript itself (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017).

For some time, there has been a dispute among authors with regards to the place of thematic analysis in research, with many experts describing it as a method rather than a methodology (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017; Clarke and Braun, 2013; King, 2004). Additionally, other researchers have stressed its importance to neophyte researchers as it "…provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis" (Braun and Clarke, 2006 p.78). These skills involve the researcher ultimately becoming the instrument for the analysis (Starks and Trinidad, 2007), making judgements regarding codes and subsequently categorising and thematising the data.

5.10.1 Thematic Analysis: Advantages and Disadvantages

As with all methods, there are advantages and disadvantages pertaining to thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). For example, while Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise the penetrative and reliable findings from rigorous thematic analysis, Nowell et al. (2017) assert that the lack of consensus on how the method can be rigorously applied can be a significant issue for novice researchers. In addition, a body of researchers, such as Braun and Clarke (2006) and King (2004), claim that thematic analysis is a highly flexible approach which provides robust and detailed accounts of the data. In contrast, others feel that such flexibility can lead to incoherent findings derived from the data (Holloway and Todres, 2003). There remains a significant advantage of thematic analysis, which was essentially, the determining argument for its use. It

is argued (Miles and Huberman 1994; Creswell 2009) that by more than one data gathering instrument (in this case qualitative surveys and focus groups) the data presented by thematic analysis will be produced more effectively and, according to Alhojailan (2012), "reflect the reality of the data collection" (p.41). Therefore, it was a combination of this last point, along with Braun and Clarke's (2006) arguments for its application, that cemented my decision to use thematic analysis in the initial pilot and in the subsequent larger-scale study.

5.10.2 Thematic Analysis of the Data

Before analysing the data, a significant amount of reading was done to best prepare myself for the 'job in hand' (King, 2004; Saldana, 2013; Maxwell, 1996; Maguire and Delahunt, 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2006). While so much of the reading made interesting, worthwhile and effective points, it was Maxwell's (1996) opinion that specifically made sense. Maxwell argues that in qualitative research…

> ...the goal of coding is not to produce counts of things, but to fracture the data and rearrange it into categories that facilitate the comparison of data within and between these categories and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts. (p.78-9)

Maguire and Delahunt (2017) affirm this assertion, conveying that [coding aids} the identification of patterns and themes in order to present findings about specific issues or research questions. However, that is not to say that findings can be simplified as a result. In fact, Braun and Clarke (2006) make the distinction between two levels of themes that can be determined:

- Semantic themes: At this stage, first-level findings from the data are engaged with, with the researcher "…not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said…" (p.84)
- Latent themes: In total contrast however, the latent level looks much deeper, finding potentially intended meanings that may not have been not necessarily explicitly conveyed, examining "…underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations…" (p.84)

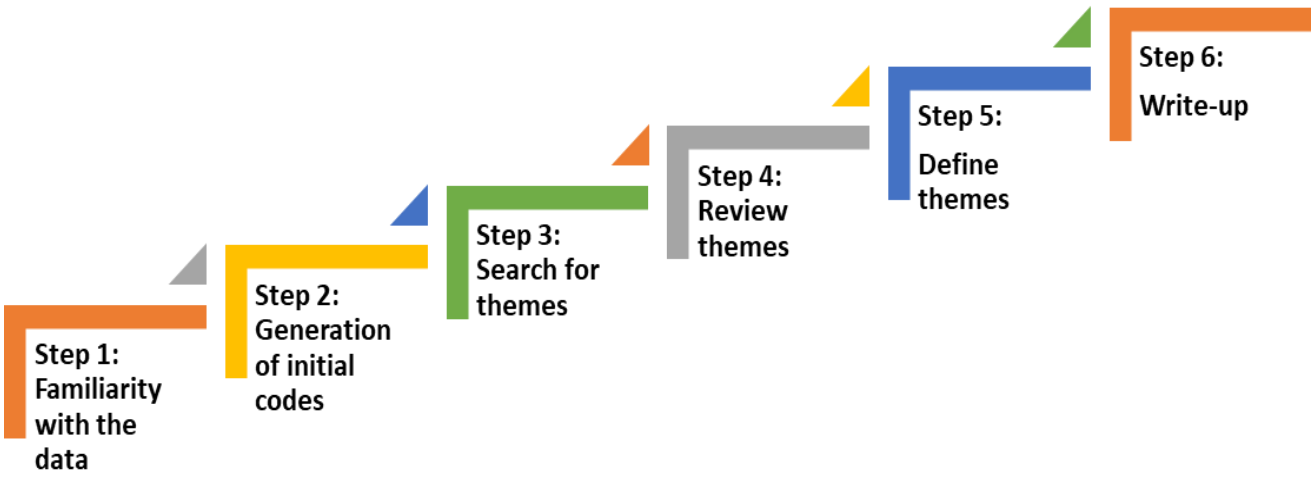
How these theme-levels relate to the findings of this research in both the qualitative surveys as well as the focus groups, will be discussed in the next chapter.

While it is important to acknowledge that there are indeed numerous ways to approach the analysis of data, it was ultimately decided that a deductive approach, in combination with a constructionist focus would probably be most appropriate to the research questions and the

data to be analysed (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This approach would result in existing concepts directing the coding procedure and identification of themes, while acknowledging, that the data itself, will create a certain reality. Irrespective of the interview schedule or the initial research questions themselves, it was predicted that there could still be potential emergent themes from the data being analysed that may not have been predetermined by the researcher.

While researching the method, it became apparent that one can approach thematic analysis in a plethora of ways (Alhojailan, 2012; Javadi & Zarea, 2016). In this study, to gain the greatest insights from the 'data corpus' (the qualitative survey responses and focus group transcripts), a combination of Saldana's (2009) suggestions and Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps programme for thematic analysis, would be used (see Figure 19). Maguire and Delahunt (2017) make the significant point that, when using this process of thematic analysis, the steps may not always be taken as prescriptive or indeed conducted in a linear/chronological mode. They also assert that the direction of the process is predominantly dictated by the research question itself and the data corpus as it is presented.

Figure 19: Braun and Clarke's (2006) Six Steps to Thematic Analysis



Source: Braun and Clarke (2006)

5.10.2.1 Step 1: Becoming familiar with the data

On collating the responses from the qualitative survey, as well as typing up the transcripts from the focus groups, I took Braun and Clarke's (2006) advice, along with that of Maguire and Delahunt (2017) and became much more familiar with the data corpus through reviewing, reading and re-reading its content. While initial notes were taken in my research journal throughout the process, especially during the various focus groups, it was on listening to the recordings, and examining the various responses from the surveys, that a deeper level of notes were made. Not only did these notes give initial impressions from the surveys and focus groups, they also generated questions for me as researcher and essentially informed the next steps of the process.

5.10.2.2 Step 2: Generating initial codes

The next stage of the process determined that the data corpus needed to be systematically organised. Even though specific research questions needed to be addressed in both the qualitative surveys and the focus groups, the thematic analysis was essentially inductive. It was a coding process without 'shoe-horning' the findings into a pre-existing coding frame (Boyatzis, 1998). Using Nvivo software, first, or initial, codes were created, and the survey data and transcripts were analysed and methodically examined, with the intention of delivering rigour and validity to the findings. Saldana (2009) describes codes as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/ or attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p.3).

There was no code limit in the process, with an exhaustive identification of potential codes. However, Saldana's (2009) point that coding is essentially cyclical, was noteworthy and it took subsequent code-generating cycles (three in total) to progress towards an evocative data analysis. Using the advice of Bazeley and Jackson (2019) and Saldana (2016) during each coding cycle, aided in the revisions of codes (1st cycle and 3rd cycle coding reviewed by myself, while my supervisor second-coded a portion of the data corpus in order to affirm and justify my own code generation). When needed, text was coded using multiple codes that were relevant, as opposed to a nuanced approach to capture all codes in one (Jackson and Bazeley, 2019, p.72). Hierarchies were established to create a structure for the nodes. This strategy was decided upon for several reasons, as advocated by Jackson and Bazeley (2019, p.105):

- Organisation

- Conceptual clarity
- Prompt to code richly
- Identifying patterns

5.10.2.3 Step 3: Searching for emergent themes

At this point in the process, again using Nvivo software, the codes were analysed to identify the various themes/categories from the data. DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000) describe a theme, as an…

> …abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole (p.362).

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that each individual theme is not necessarily reliant on quantifiable measures but rather on whether it finds something important in the data in relation to the overarching research question(s). Although, the initial code generation could be described as an inductive process. Additionally, the codes were examined in terms of their interaction with each other.

5.10.2.4 Step 4: Reviewing Themes

Did the themes from step 3 make sense? Did they need to be modified and/or developed? All themes needed to be reflected upon in order to answer these questions. All the data that was associated with each emergent theme was read and re-read to ascertain if the data did support the associated themes. In the main research study, this would need to be done across all focus group interviews, but in this case just the one transcript needed to re-analysed. Taking Maguire and Delahunt's (2017) lead, the following questions aided and directed my analysis and review:

- Do the themes make sense?
- Does the data support the themes?
- Am I trying to fit too much into a theme?
- If themes overlap, are they really separate themes?
- Are there themes within themes (subthemes)?
- Are there other themes within the data?

(Maguire and Delahunt, 2017 p.3358)

Some of the themes did not feel completely appropriate or effective, for example, given the data, neither 'Language' nor 'Primary/Secondary Transition' was enough to stand on their own merits as emerging themes. On reviewing and analysing the data again, it became increasingly obvious that certain themes could be subcategorised into subthemes. For example, in the initial draft, the theme of 'Time' had subthemes of 'Curriculum Overload' and 'Timetabling'. In addition, 'Language' was re-categorised as a sub-theme of the 'Planning' theme, while 'Transition' became a sub-theme of 'Pupils and the Language'

5.10.2.5 Step 5: Defining Themes

At this point, themes were refined and ultimately defined, for correct and succinct theme identification (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The process itself was deliberate and focused and as a result the initial seven themes were refined down to four core emergent themes (Perceptions About Language Learning, Primary Education in the Republic of Ireland, Teaching the ML in the Primary School, Staffing, Staff Capacity and Local School Issues). There was a plethora of sub-themes derived from each one. Such a process made the coding and categorising more manageable. The creation of a mind-map of all of themes, gave very insightful and visual representation of the findings, capturing the various themes and sub-themes, some of which were latent while others were semantic. These illustrations will be shown in the next chapter.

5.10.2.6 Step 6: Writing up

The writing-up stage of the research generally marks the completion of the study. In this case, it was determined by the initial drafting and subsequent re-drafting, of thesis chapters on the methodology used in the study, the data analysis and the ultimate findings. In essence, the data analysis needed to be converted into a readily interpretable final product with the validity and the merits of the research, the findings and the analysis, being conveyed convincingly to the reader. To do this effectively, the writing needed to go far beyond a straightforward, descriptive narrative of emergent themes. It needed to present a clear, lucid, evidence-based analysis and argument, linked directly to the research questions themselves.

5.11 Ethics and the Research

Ethical approval was applied for and granted by the University of Lincoln in November/December 2017. In making the application, a small number of significant considerations had to be taken into account. Research participants, while for the benefit of the study were in four categories (primary teachers, primary principals, 6th class primary pupils, 3rd

year secondary students), for ethical purposes, were narrowed down to two categories: adults and under 18s. In terms of the adults, the identity of the participants was protected through all stages of the research (both from the survey and the focus groups), and the process was documented appropriately, in order to maintain a rigorous audit trail as recommended by Halej (2017). Informed consent was sought in both the surveys and the focus groups and BERA guidelines (BERA, 2011) were strictly adhered to. Information about the study was presented in both the surveys and during the focus groups. All participants in the latter signed consent forms prior to the focus groups being conducted. Any further questions were dealt with at that point in the process.

In terms of participants' backgrounds, save knowing some adult participants' superficial relationship to the MLPSI, (or lack thereof), little or no information was known to the researcher. While they would be introduced to the topic of the survey and focus group when invited to take part, none of the teachers would have any knowledge of the questions being asked until they were posed.

In relation to the participants who were under the age of 18, the same iterative process was applied. Each principal/headteacher was contacted, the research explained to them in detail and information letters, links to the surveys and consent forms sent to them. Given the complete absence of any sensitive material and the pupils'/students' complete anonymity, my supervisor had given permission for the principals/headteachers to act *in loco parentis* to give consent from the school to take part in the survey. Parental consent forms were also given to the principals/headteachers if they felt that signed parental consent would be preferable. (Appendix 1)

With all stages of the research, all participants were presented with an unambiguous route to withdraw from the research and all necessary steps were taken to ensure the ethics of the research were maintained. As previously stated, the online survey for teachers/principals was circulated to a convenience sample and, subsequently, a snowball sample of professionals. On completion of the survey there was a tick-box for research participants to state their willingness (or not) to participate in a focus group. In respect of the under 18s surveys, focus groups were not used.

Participants in the surveys were given a closing date for withdrawal of 31st March for teachers/principals and 20th April for pupils/students. The dates differed due to the circulation dates being different, with the adult surveys sent out several weeks before the under 18 counterparts.

In terms of identification of participants, anonymity was guaranteed, no names were used and if direct quotes were to be presented in the thesis, these would be attributed to a pseudonym (e.g., PA). Once the surveys were collated, all online individual data was deleted with responses only, maintained, and no contact details kept by the researcher. Furthermore, both the initial survey findings and the interview transcripts were not accessed by anyone, save for the researcher and supervisor. Hard copies of data were kept in a secure, locked filing cabinet, while all soft copies are password protected on the researcher's laptop. All documents will be kept on file for 2 years.

5.12: Conclusion

This chapter expounded the epistemological perspective underpinning the study, and clearly outlined the implications of its theoretical framework for the various aspects of the research: the identification and selection of the overall methodology, collection of the data and the thematic analysis methods used. The chapter has provided a detailed account of the research design, structured to ascertain the perceptions of pupils, teachers and principals in respect of the potential implementation of a MFL curriculum at primary level in the Republic of Ireland. Given that a variety of participant perspectives lay at the core of the study, significant consideration was afforded to respond both ethically and responsibly to all participants' inclusion and any data subsequently generated. This chapter provides a rationale for the selection and design of the research instruments, their method of employment and their limitations. The design of the triangulation of methods was presented in order to demonstrate the all-inclusive perspective of the research. What is important for the reader to be cognisant of, is the reaffirmed fact, that this study is not seeking generalizable findings in any *a priori* sense.

The following two chapters will present descriptions of the data generated from, firstly the qualitative surveys, and secondly the focus groups. The data is framed by the research questions discussed and will provide next-level evidence to shape the ultimate findings. The

next chapter will present findings that give broader perspectives from the qualitative surveys, through in-depth analysis, in order to seek answers to the key research questions as outlined.

CHAPTER 6: GENERATING THE FINDINGS: QUALITATIVE SURVEYS

"How are we to remain faithful to the old in the new conditions?
Only in this way can we generate something new."

Slavoj Zizek (2001, p.33)

6.1 Introduction

The next two chapters will present the findings from the data that was generated and collected from the surveys and focus groups of this study. Through the integration of both sets of data, it is envisaged that the research questions in Chapter 1 will be clarified. How these questions are ultimately answered will take place in the next chapter on analysing the findings. This chapter outlines the themes that emerged from qualitative surveys of four key groups of stakeholders throughout the academic year 2018/2019, while Chapter 7 will outline emerging themes from the focus groups. In the two chapters, there are two important points to note. Firstly, the findings will be presented in relation to the participants' responses, to provide the reader with the contrast of perspectives and perceptions from each individual sector. Secondly, while the analysed data is presented, (not just simply as raw data), there will not be an interpretation of the findings. That will follow in Chapter 8.

6.2 Findings from Open-Ended Questions in the Qualitative Surveys

In addition to the demographic, closed questions which will be presented later in this chapter, there were also open-ended questions in the three qualitative surveys, which produced a deeper level of response to questions. This complemented the more-specific nature of the demographic questions, therefore providing richer data for the study. Here they will be presented in three distinct alignments, based on the initial survey groupings. The results will eventually integrate with the conceptual framework developed from Chapters 2 and 3 to develop the themes for the next chapter.

6.2.1 Principals and Teachers

6.2.1.1 Responses to the question: 'Please explain why you do/do not believe there are benefits to learning a MFL at primary level'

As already stated, principals and teachers received the exact same survey. Four of the questions were open-ended, offering the respondents ample space to communicate their thoughts on each question. As in the closed question that preceded it, most of the responses to this question assigned benefits to primary MFL learning. In order to present the broadest possible findings, responses are presented here which represent the general responses to the question.

From a thematic point of view, many of the responses were coded under several themes/sub-themes. The sub-themes of *Learning a Language* and *Relevance and Importance* featured greatly in the responses. Some examples of direct quotes from the responses are shown below:

- *I believe that by learning MFLs at primary level, children will have a better base knowledge of the language entering secondary school.*
- *I believe there are numerous benefits to learning a MFL in 5th & 6th class. It improves students' memory skills. It would increase their self-esteem and therefore enhance their general well-being.*
- *I think that the earlier children are immersed in a language they are more likely to become fluent or at least reach a level of proficiency.*
- *Children's brains are like sponges in JI, SI, will absorb a lot more than we currently offer. Would cultivate a positive attitude towards language learning at a young age. Integrate perfectly with transfer of skills on the new PLC*
- *It's much easier for kids to learn MFL when they are young and have no inhibitions. Using songs and rhymes, accent and intonation can be developed before they become self-conscious.*

Additionally, the subthemes of *Cultural and Communication, Links to Other Countries, Language Learning Skills* and *Pupil Enjoyment,* overlapped in other directly quoted responses:

- *Also it would integrate very well with SESE subjects when completing enquiries on countries - it would further open children's minds to our intercultural diverse world.*
- *It provides an opportunity for students to learn more about different cultures & countries.*
- *Research would indicate that children have a propensity to learn new languages at a young age and that this benefits them (1) in their own mother tongue and (2) they achieve better academic outcomes. They are also able to transfer skills they have learned in one language to another. I also think that learning languages helps children to develop socially and to increase their awareness of other cultures.*
- *When I was involved in ML initiative some years ago, the children really looked forward to the lessons and learned so much. It introduced not only language skills but cultural knowledge of the European country. Reports from the children after they entered Post*

Primary schools was that their exposure to a European language at Primary had helped them hugely to progress at a faster rate in Post Primary school.

However, there were counterarguments in the survey, with the theme of *Curriculum Overload* dominating the findings. This theme was directly quoted in terms of the workload of both teachers and pupils:

- *Curriculum is overloaded already. Teachers struggle to cover subjects already there. Lots of children with learning support needs in English and maths.*
- *The earlier any language is learned the better. But I would be concerned about extra pressure but on students and teachers with an extra subject.*

The place of the Irish language, its status within the education system and the potential negative effects that a MFL could have were identified by several participants:

- *We are having great difficulty with the teaching of language in general. It would be a mistake to add a third language while we're failing at two. Remove Irish from the Curriculum and perhaps it would create space for another language.*
- *I also would be very concerned about our own Irish language. Levels, interest and standards are already declining, and I feel like the introduction of a 'more popular' language would further this decline.*

Most responses to this question were in the affirmative, citing the "earlier the better" hypothesis, giving multiple benefits for the pupils as learners in terms of language and culture and preparation for secondary school. Conversely, the less favourable, but equally important issues that were highlighted by various participants included curriculum overload, multi-grade classrooms and the potential negative effect the MFL could have on the Irish language.

6.2.1.2 Responses to the question: 'What do you consider to be the challenges that would need to be addressed in order to implement a primary MFL?'

Responding to this question, there was only the potential to put forward considerations regarding potential obstacles to introducing and implementing a primary MFL. All the participants responded to this question (n=108). Again, many of the answers given overlapped, with subthemes such as:

Staffing and Staff Capacity:

- *Teachers not sufficiently fluent to deliver such a programme*
- *This would be time consuming and require a knowledge of languages among teaching staff*
- *Teachers would need training or else funding would be needed for an outside teacher of languages to come to the school.*

Parents:

- *Parents may be against the extra workload in some cases.*

Curriculum Overload and Time Issues:

- *Initiative overload*
- *Completely overhaul the curriculum, no time allowed for extra language at the moment.*
- *Curriculum timetable and current overload of paperwork.*

Pupils with Learning Difficulties/SEN:

- *Differentiation for children with SEN including EAL.*
- *There could be challenges in relation to a child's academic ability whereby they have difficulties with the English language but I believe children of all abilities and additional needs should be exposed regardless.*

A significant list of challenges was presented by participants, highlighting the importance of a new primary curriculum, the development of staff capacity and the number of trained teachers to deliver the programme. The effect that the MFL could potentially have on pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) was also highlighted. Overall, it is clear it was envisaged that the lack of time and the extra workload attached to the introduction of the MFL would prove difficult also.

6.2.1.3 Responses to the question: 'How do you think these challenges could be overcome?'

As a follow up to the previous question, respondents were invited to offer their potential solutions to the challenges that they identified. All the participants responded to the question (n=108). As with other open-ended questions, a number of themes and sub-themes became apparent from the coding process, and a representative sample of the responses will be presented here:

In the subtheme *Qualification for Language* a variety of ideas were put forward for overcoming issues such as CPD and initial teacher-training*:*

- *A course in MFL introduced at the level of training college.*
- *Proper school-based planning & training.*
- *Compulsory MFL modules in Initial teacher training.*
- *Incentives for qualified teachers to upskill in the target language.*
- *Ongoing supports for teachers that is not just a token effort e.g., lesson by lesson training, trial in the classroom & feedback to get things up & running.*
- *The immediate reintroduction of the MLPSI following a simple audit of qualified MFL teachers in the system.*
- *Provide some refresher in-service training for teachers.*

Reorganising the curriculum was advocated in the sub-theme *Primary Curriculum and Curricular Issues:*

- *run after school classes*
- *An overhaul of the subject areas within the curriculum. More resources needed to support English oral language, esp. in DEIS. Schools.*
- *Reduce religion time to 3 sessions per week & introduce new language for 2 sessions.*
- *Reduce gaeilge to 20 mins oral language per day.*
- *Reduce religious instruction to 15 mins per day or take it out and leave it to parents to provide religious education of their choice. That would give us 45 mins.*

For many participants, clustering schools with a peripatetic teacher was an option, but others preferred the potential of using staff teachers under the sub-theme *Who to teach the language?*

- *The deployment of Specialist language teachers could help alleviate stress or confidence issues amongst class teachers.*
- *Teachers could swop classes-teachers who have the necessary language skills could teach the language*

- *Team teaching - Teachers with the necessary language skills could team teach with the class teacher. Modelled lessons - Expert teachers could model methodologies for small groups of teachers to build confidence among staffs.*
- *I would suggest bring in a native teacher to school clusters*
- *Government funded initiative in a few pilot schools, including multigrade settings in rural Ireland.*
- *I think using current staff works better*

The sub-theme of *Integration* was an idea to alleviate the time issue*:*

- *Less focus on individual subjects- proper linkage & integration.*
- *Integrate the language with themes similar to Irish themes so that they facilitate Integration with other subjects.*

Teaching Considerations, Approaches and Resources were also cited as being useful ideas:

- *If lessons are interactive, fun and engaging, this challenge could be overcome.*
- *Using CLIL as a methodology.*

While most of the responses were in answer to the challenges put forward, several respondents believed their challenges were insurmountable:

- *We're already doing a huge amount, regular subjects, green school, Active flag initiatives, global citizenship etc. What should be removed so that a MFL could be added?*
- *Massive challenge!*
- *There is no way to overcome curriculum overload without removing parts of the curriculum.*
- *I don't think they can be unfortunately.*

A considerable quantity of ideas was provided to overcome the challenges of the previous question. The most prevalent suggestions were in relation to the importance of training for teachers (CPD and ITT), curriculum reforms, the potential role for specialist/visiting teachers and the teaching methodologies used. There remained, however, a considerable quorum of responses that felt that the challenges were indeed insurmountable.

6.4.1.4 Responses to the question: 'Anything Further to Add?'

In the final question in the survey, again all participants responded (n=108), however many responded with a 'No' answer. Given the potential overlap with previous questions, repetitive responses have not been included. The following are a representative sample of an extremely varied set of responses:

A number of respondents had, or were, teaching a MFL at the time of the survey and had positive opinions of their experiences:

- *At present fifth class in our school take part in a four week German programme in our local secondary school which has been running for years. They thoroughly enjoy it and it sparks an interest and enjoyment of German.*
- *I am a teaching principal who has continued to upskill in language teaching. I have used discretionary curriculum time to continue to introduce a MFL in our school. I would be delighted to be part of any focus group investigating the reintroduction of the MLPSI.*
- *I taught German as part of the MFL in primary school pilot project. Children enjoyed learning about their peers in Germany and Their traditions. It is a great pity this initiative was suspended*
- *Had some experience with this being offered to 5th and 6th and they loved it!*
- *I have taught Spanish and French to my students in 2nd class at points where there was time however I found it difficult to get the time when teaching 5th and 6th*

While others had a more negative experience:

- *I have first-hand experience of this, and it put me as a class teacher under severe pressure to cover the curriculum.*
- *Worked in a school whereby children were taught French in fifth and sixth class. Worked well but there was an occasion where visiting teacher for one term had little experience of teaching a full classroom of primary-aged students. This affected the learning at times.*

Other respondents believed that MFLs had utilitarian benefits:

- *Ireland will soon be the only English speaking country in the EU if Brexit goes ahead. International language skills are a must*
- *But if we are preparing children for life in the modern world facility with languages is important.*
- *I feel it would be a good opportunity for children to get a first step on the ladder prior to going to secondary school.*
- *Children get excited about the idea of being able to speak another language when they go on a European holiday or when they engage in a Skype classroom activity.*

Another respondent mentioned the importance of the subtheme CLIL and linked this to an introduction of MFLs into *Gaelscoileanna*

- *Gaelscoileanna introducing a third language as per the Content & language integrated learning (Clil)*

Contrasting views were given regarding the subtheme of *Parents:*

- *The learning of a MFL is something sought after by parents on an annual basis. It would be wonderful to have DES support for this worthwhile venture.*
- *good opportunity to involve foreign language speaking parents, ties in with Blue Flag initiatives.*

Despite the constructive nature of many responses, according to some of the respondents, there did seem to be insurmountable challenges:

- *It could provoke disagreement among parents. Some parents may wish for their children to focus more on Irish and others may argue for their child to be exempt from Irish so that they can focus on a MFL instead.*
- *I am convinced that exposure to a MFL at primary level is very desirable, but I have to say that the current curriculum (with the new PLC etc) is difficult to implement and assess properly. It is an overwhelming job at the moment for most classroom practitioners and I think that there isn't the time or energy for another subject.*
- *I would love to think that we could bring a MFL into primary schools but at the moment most teachers are just keeping their heads above water with paper work without introducing yet another new initiative.*

The responses to this question were a mix of what could be considered positive, as well as negative perceptions. Several participants referred to their experiences of teaching the MFL at primary level, with the majority of responses reflecting the positive experience. One participant however, conveyed their concerns after their own experience. Such curriculum-related apprehension was also asserted by several other teachers, in terms of overload, the new primary language curriculum and the potential negative effect the MFL could have on the Irish language. One respondent mentioned a cluster model approach, which could have considerable implications for smaller, rural schools with staffing issues in relation to a MFL specialist teacher.

6.4.2 6th Class Pupils and 3rd Year Students

As already stated, the two school-going participant groups had different surveys from their adult counterparts, and indeed, the questions varied between the 6th class and 3rd year. The surveys with the younger group were conducted in this way in order to derive two slightly contrasting types of opinions, with an emphasis on nuance rather than on lengthy responses. Both groups were asked questions which caused them to reflect on their current educational circumstances, however the 3rd year students, by answering questions in relation to primary school, were allowed to combine their current position and knowledge to retrospectively reflect. Such consideration should demonstrate a higher level of thinking and, especially in view of their upcoming state examinations, should produce worthwhile data. Please note that their responses are included verbatim, and no spelling/grammar errors have been corrected.

6.4.2.1 6th Class Pupils

The 6th class pupils were asked three open-ended questions in total, with an extra question identifying what language if any, they think should be introduced at primary level. In terms of potential languages to learn in primary school, pupils put forward six options: French, Spanish, German, Italian, Japanese and Romanian.

6.4.2.1.1 Responses to the question: 'Why do you think that knowing a MFL (for example, French or Spanish) is useful/not useful?'

All the pupils responded to the question (n=21), however, some replied in the affirmative and others were less favourable. A representative sample of the responses are presented here. The subtheme of *Relevance and Importance* was quite prevalent among the responses

- *You can use it to get a job in either of those countries or to communicate on holidays*
- *If you go to a different country you can communicate with the people around you.*

- *When you go into secondary school it will come in handy*
- *If you go on holidays you can use what you have learned*
- *Because you can communicate with other people and learn more things about different countries.*
- *it could be easier to communicate with spanish/french speakers*

It is important to emphasise that not all the responses were positive in relation to primary MFLs, and the following were given as answers to this question and the subtheme of *Not Useful* was evident:

- *because I think primary school is too young to learn a language (but I think secondary school is fine)*
- *cause its not like im going to live in france spain*
- *I dont really know*

Career prospects, secondary school, holidays and communication were the main foci of respondents whether communicating reasons for learning the MFL in primary school, or not. One respondent felt that primary school is too young, however beginning the MFL at secondary level is "fine".

6.4.2.1.2 Responses to the question: 'Why do you think/or not that a MFL should be taught in primary school?'

All participants responded to this question (n=21), and there was echoing of the responses to the previous question under the subtheme *Relevance and Importance, Travel, Career* and *Relevance to Education*. Here is a representative sample of the responses:

- *Because you got to a different country you can communicate with people your own age and make new friends.*
- *Because some people may want to use their social skills on holidays*
- *because it should be useful in the future while trying to get a job*
- *It could give you an advantage in secondary school*
- *Because you can learn better at a young age and is a great useful skill to have.*
- *it would be useful in the future*
- *to have more languages in your vocabulary*
- *it could be fun useful and a head start for secondary school*

- *so you can speak more than two speaks*

As in the previous question, several responses were unfavourable to primary MFLs, for the following reasons:

- *no it is to hard*
- *children i think are still to young even in 5/6th*

The responses here echo those from the previous question, reinforcing the importance of the influence on future career paths, holidays in the target countries and the head start for secondary school. The only slight differences were the reference to the development of social skills and the elaboration on how useful the language would be on holidays. The less favourable responses reaffirmed the opinion that 5th and 6th class was too early to introduce the MFL, while one respondent anticipated the difficulty in learning the MFL.

6.4.2.1.3 Responses to the question: 'Is there anything else that you would like to say?'

All pupils responded to this question (n=21) however, most responded with a simple 'No'. Here are the other responses. Again, mostly in favour of a primary MFL and came under the subtheme of *Relevance and Importance* and *Relevance to Education* but with one exception.

- *Learning a third language should not be compulsory but should be recommended*
- *You should have to learn at least 1-2 languages (excluding english)*
- *learning lanages is good for your brain*
- *I would like to learn different languages in school so i don't fall behind in secondary school*
- *why dont we learn different languages in primary school from 4th class to secondary school*
- *new languages are to hard for kids under 13*

6.4.2.2 3rd Year Students

3rd year students were provided with five open-ended questions in their survey.

6.4.2.2.1 Responses to the question: 'What is your opinion on learning a MFL?'

All participants responded to the question (n=21) but many of the responses were quite repetitive in their opinions. Given that there had been perceivably negative opinions in some of the other questions, it is interesting to note that there was no such response to this question.

Here is a representative sample of the responses to the question, with all coming under the subthemes of *Relevance and Importance, Travel, Career* and *Relevance to Education*.

- *helps you with third level education. And for job applications*
- *I think it opens doors to other countries and cultures and is very worthwhile and it has amazing benefits.*
- *Helps bridge gaps in communication*
- *I think that it can help knowing another language when you go on holidays or when you are getting into college*
- *it can help if you are travelling abroad or for work*
- *It is important as it gives us more options abroad for when we get older*
- *it helps on foreign holidays*
- *it is interesting and very useful to have when finished school*

Career prospects, communication and cultural reasons were all given by participants.

6.4.2.2.2 Responses to the question: 'How important is learning a MFL for your generation?'

Again, as with the previous question, the responses were all positive and all participants responded (n=21). Here is the representative sample of the responses under the subthemes of *Relevance and Importance, Travel, Career* and *Relevance to Education*.

- *i think is very important as it is now easier then ever for people to visit other countries and it is important to learn the language.i know the improvement of technology may seem like a barrier but i think learning a language is a skill for life*
- *Very important, as there are more people moving, living and working in other countries than ever before, this is a much needed skill. It will eliminate the language barrier.*
- *Very, to reach a goal of diversity, we need to diversify our knowledge*
- *I think it would be very important go this generation wont be depending on a translating app*
- *It is very important as you need a language to get into some of the third level education*
- *very, because it can lead to many different jobs when you get older*
- *very as it gives us an opportunity to expand our vocabulary in a different language*
- *it is quite important when finished school for future jobs that some people might get*

Language-learning is, according to the participants, very important for international mobility, for the development of linguistic and cultural diversity, for future career, as well as the importance of learning a new skill.

6.4.2.2.3 Responses to the question: 'Why do you think/not that a MFL should be introduced in primary school?'

Given that relative positivity of the previous questions, responses to this question included a little bit more personal pragmatism for the participants, who all responded (n=21) under the subtheme *Learning a Language, Not Convinced* and *Relevance to Education*.

- *yes because we learned Irish in primary school and going into secondary school it wasn't hard but starting off learning a totally new language was.*
- *Because it would give primary school pupils and good start at learning a new language*
- *I think they should as children will have a better grasp for languages if learning form a young age.*
- *As it gives the students a feel for the language, and a foundation upon which to learn on.*
- *it would benefit the students when they go to secondary school and they would know so basic vocab*
- *because not everyones first language is english*
- *good for when we go into secondary school. Headstart*

Not all the respondents felt that it should be introduced:

- *well id like them to teach our own irish language first as I think that's more important at that age to be learning the basic as in some primary schools they lack being able to teach it to some extent which is proven difficult to some secondary students as they lack basic irish skills but when in first I found learning French easy as we were getting the basics and I find it easier then irish at this stage.*
- *PRimary school students should focus on core subjects in primary school*
- *no, because three languages might be a little too much at such a young age*
- *because it might be more of a strain on them for studying and homework*

Several respondents communicated their thoughts regarding the importance of a MFL as preparation for secondary school, while others believed primary school is too early to learn the

language, that more focus should first be put on the Irish language, and the potential strain that an extra subject could have for homework.

6.4.2.2.4 Responses to the question: 'What changes, do you think, would need to be made for primary schools to introduce a MFL?'

This question did not require a binary response and required more reflection on the part of the respondents, all of whom, once again, replied to the question (n=21). Three key subthemes were prevalent, including:

Reorganisation of the Curriculum:

- *Do less religion classes*
- *Optional subjects should be introduced*
- *subjects would have to go such as pe or other subjects not tested*
- *I think that they should set aside a certain time slot as well as a set course designed for the age group.*

Gaeilge- Attitude and Usefulness:

- *teach the irish language properly first and we'll talk about that later.*

Staffing and Staff Capacity (Linguistic Competence, Qualification for Language):

- *Teachers with experience in MFLs need to work in primary schools*
- *I don't think that there would have to be many changes made in primary schools aside from primary school teachers obviously knowing the language they have to teach*
- *Teachers to be qualified*

Respondents suggested a selection of potential changes for an MFL to be introduced, including a reduction in subjects, the introduction of specialist teachers and the use of an appropriate MFL programme.

6.4.2.2.5 Responses to the question: 'Do you have anything you would like to add?'

As with all the surveys, this question was included in order to discover any supplementary thoughts. All participants responded (n=21) and save for the 'No' responses to this question, the responses given overlapped with previous responses:

- *I think it would help them in the coming years.*

- *the option to choose a different languages if you need them in the future such as Mandarin or German.*
- *I think is a special skill to be able to learn a language*
- *irish is a part of our culture and it is very important and I believed it will fade away if something is not done about it.*
- *Students should not be pressured too much with MFL in primary, only cover basics*
- *all teachers should be fluent*

This last open-ended question provided the respondents with an opportunity to share any other thoughts that they may have had. The responses were varied and emphasised diversification of languages, the importance of having a specialist teacher, the need for a relatively limited PMFL curriculum and the potential negative impact the MFL could have on the Irish language.

6.3 Findings from Contextual Questions in the Survey

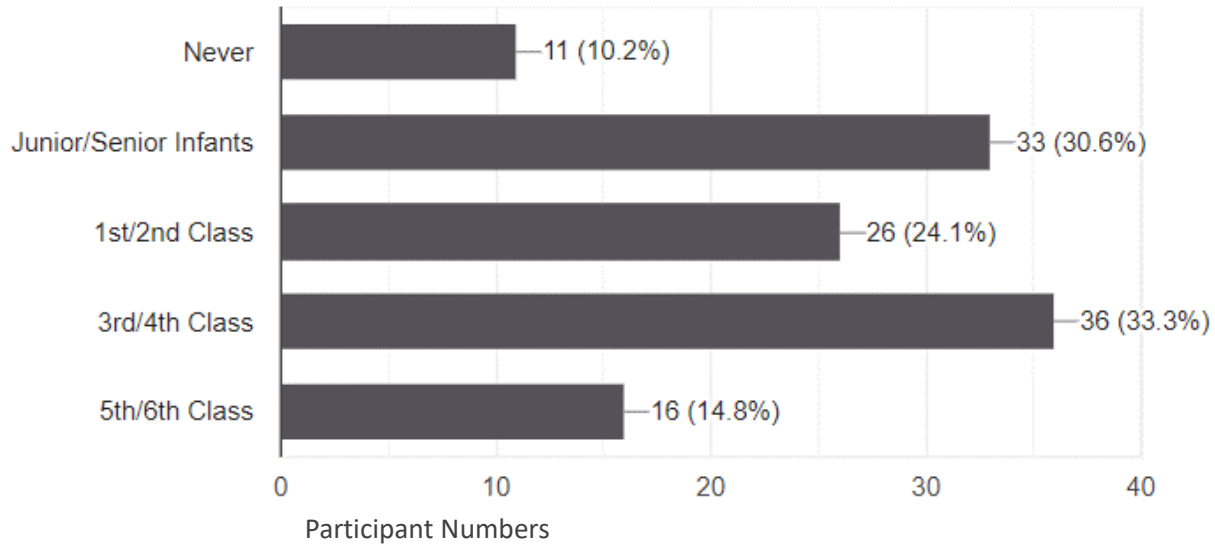
In order to understand the background contexts of the respondents to the qualitative survey, several closed, contextual questions were posed.

6.3.1 Principals and Teachers

After providing contact details etc, the participants were asked if their school was part of the Delivering Equality in Schools (DEIS) Initiative. All participants answered the question and 51.5% of participants were teaching in a DEIS school, with 48.5% not in a DEIS school (n=108). Five respondents did not respond whether their primary school was rural or urban, with 57 of the respondents stating they worked in a rural primary school, and 46 working in an urban setting.

Additional research-specific questions were posed. Firstly, participants were asked if they believed that there are benefits to learning a MFL at primary level. 97.2% of respondents replied in the affirmative, with 2.8% believing that there are no benefits (n=108). To probe further, the question was posed 'When do you believe a MFL should be introduced at primary level?' All participants answered (n=108) and gave the following responses (see Figure 20):

Figure 20: Findings from When do you believe a MFL should be introduced at primary level?



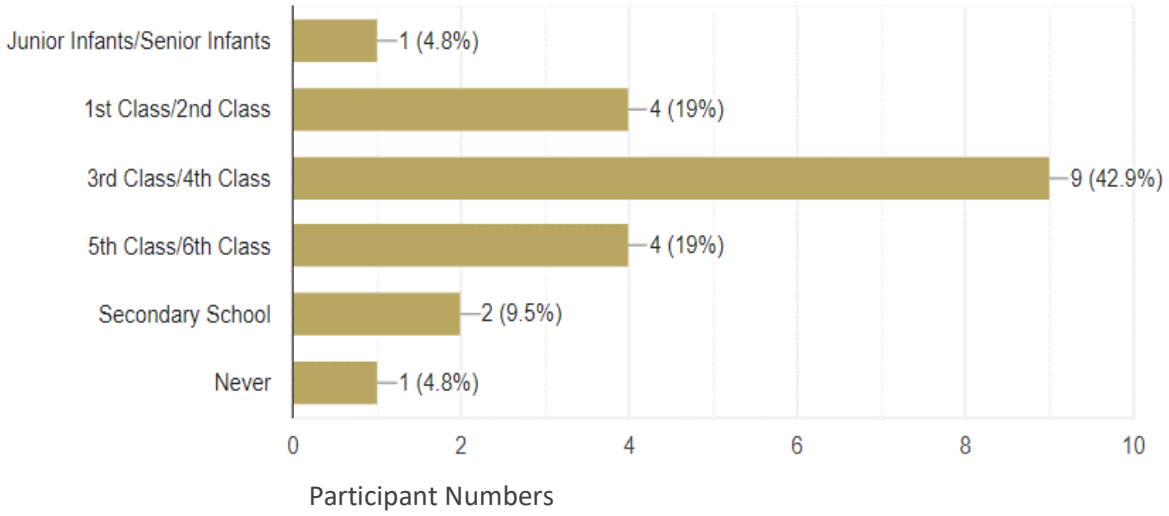
6.3.2 6th Class Pupils and 3rd Year Students

All participants responded to all the questions (6th class n=21, 3rd year n=21). While there was overlap in the types of questions, the wording differed in each survey. There was something of a spiral development in the survey, so that through its progression there should be a deeper understanding of the respondents' perceptions on PMFL learning.

6.3.2.1 6th Class Pupils

Firstly, pupils were asked if they learned a language at primary school other than English or Irish. Two of the 21 respondents had experience of learning a language, one had learned Spanish, and one had learned Vietnamese. The pupils were then asked if they believed that knowing a MFL (e.g., French or Spanish) was useful. 85.7% of respondents agreed that it was useful and 14.3% felt that it was not useful. After completing an open-ended response to this question, pupils were then asked if they believed that a MFL should be taught in primary school. Again, 18 of the respondents felt that it should be taught in primary school, with 3 pupils asserting that it should not. Taking this further, the participants were asked when they thought that a MFL could be introduced, this included a 'never' response and a 'secondary school' response. The findings are evident in Figure 21.

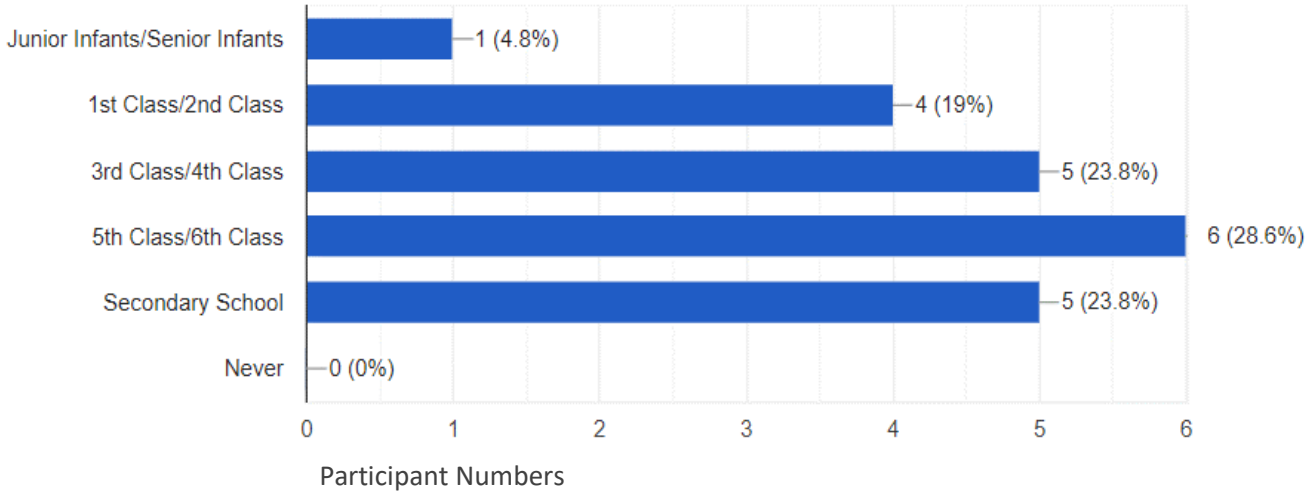
Figure 21: When do you think that a MFL should be introduced?



6.3.2.2 3rd Year Students

To begin, students were asked if they had learned a MFL in primary school. Six of the respondents had learned a MFL at primary school, with fifteen not having experienced the MFL at this level. Next, students were asked if they were currently learning a MFL in secondary school. All the respondents answered in the affirmative, with twenty learning French and 1 learning Spanish. Participants were then asked a triumvirate of questions: if they thought that learning a MFL in primary school would be beneficial, if they thought it should be introduced in primary school and finally, when a MFL should be introduced, if at all. Nineteen of the respondents felt that learning a MFL in primary school would be of benefit, with two respondents answering that it would not be beneficial. When it came to whether a MFL should be introduced, 16 of the respondents felt that it should be introduced, while 5 felt that it should not. In terms of when a MFL should be introduced, if ever, the participants responded as evident in Figure 22.

Figure 22: Findings from the question: 'When Do You Think a Modern Language Should Be Introduced?'



6.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented the various responses from the participants to the three types of surveys (Teachers/Principals, 6th Class Pupils, 3rd Year Students). The findings were presented firstly under the participant headings and subsequently under their corresponding questions from the survey, thematised within these headings. No commentary was provided here, as the goal of this chapter is to include only the important and relevant findings in something of an orderly sequence with the intention of providing clarity for the reader, without interpretation. Chapter 8 will feature a full discussion of these findings and those from the focus groups in relation to the research questions. Any potential implications for practice, and the recommendations will be included in Chapter 9. The next chapter will present the findings garnered from the focus groups and relate them to the themes as established at the end of the coding process.

CHAPTER 7: GENERATING THE FINDINGS: FOCUS GROUPS

'The aim of argument, or of discussion, should not be victory, but progress.'

Joseph Joubert

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the focus group phase of the research, which took place in May and June 2019. It will begin with an introduction to the focus groups and participants. Subsequently, responses from the data will be presented in relation to the original research questions presented in Chapter 1 and reiterated in Chapter 6, thereby relating the data directly to the conceptual framework developed in the research. By the end of this chapter, when the themes are summarised in relation to the research questions, the path towards data generation should be apparent to the reader. The analysis of the data, which will be discussed in the next chapter, should be further clarified. The directly quoted responses presented in this chapter, comprise a significant proportion of the total data generated from the qualitative surveys and transcribed from the focus group interviews. The focus group phase of the study did not involve the pupil/student participants from the qualitative survey phase, for a variety of reasons, including data saturation, ethics and organisational.

7.2 The Findings:

In this section, each of the secondary research questions will be used in order to collate data from the focus groups under overarching headings. This will allow the reader to identify links between the data and the original questions, without any commentary from the researcher or correlations to the literature. Themes and subthemes identified in the thematic analysis and coding process will be prevalent throughout this chapter and *italicised* to identify their presence in relation to the research questions.

7.2.1 What are the barriers to implementing a PMFL in the Republic of Ireland?

A variety of barriers were identified in every group, with most participants presenting an opinion that *time* pressure and an *overloaded curriculum* were the major issues to be overcome:

> PE: I don't know about it all. Thinking about it. It's not as if we have this space in the curriculum as it is –

> TA: It isn't easy. It gets [to the point that], you have to think, you'd have to prepare. It's not like automatically going to the next lesson in English or Irish. It's the curriculum and finding the time to do a lesson regularly. I always found it a challenge, especially with multi-grade classes.

One principal, while acknowledging the use of *integration* to alleviate *curriculum overload*, makes the point that cross-curricular planning and teaching may not be a possibility for all teachers, due to potential personality differences, and perhaps fundamental educational philosophy:

> PB: … but some teachers are not like that and they're very Maths is Maths, English is English, French is French. Where do I fit it in? What do I take away? And it's to do with maybe the personality of the teacher, etc. And I've certainly worked with people in both camps where they're very flexible around their approach, and they do exactly what you said, which is the way to do it. But others are saying unless it's, you know? there's no curriculum book there that I take out and says French are in it or Italian they are holding that's, I'm saying that's a challenge, I'm sure in some places.

Teachers' *linguistic competence* became something of an issue for several teachers, with contrasting opinions as to what *qualification* or level of language learning should be achieved by the MFL teacher:

> TF: Ok, but what do you need to teach the language in terms of qualification or experience? To live there? To have a degree? Leaving Cert? If that was the case then you had, well in my case a Leaving Cert honours in French and first year in College Spanish so should that be enough? I suppose you'd want to find out if that would be enough in terms of teaching fifth and sixth class.
>
> TG: Sufficient. Yeah, I don't think that Leaving Cert level is sufficient for the language.
>
> TA: you need to have a teacher or teachers who are both very competent and confident in the language.

The theme of *staffing supports provided* from the point of view of *funding*, training/*qualification for language*, *resources*, *language curriculum* were all discussed by various teachers:

> PA: Okay. So, I suppose the first thing is, have we got funding for somebody to facilitate the learning of whatever language it is.
>
> TH: You use resources to help but where do we get resources? How can the school afford these resources?
>
> PE: I don't want to put too much pressure on the teacher to do this but I'm just thinking they need to get help.

Several Principals referred to the theme of *multi-grade* classrooms as a major issue to be examined for any primary MFL to be implemented. One teacher referred to the issue that a smaller staff may not have capacity to teach the language:

> PC: Also, remember the majority of schools are multi-grade. Smaller schools which may not have the staffing numbers of bigger schools. An alternative for staffing for smaller schools would be vital.
>
> PD: I agree, while I taught the language myself, when I was not available, on maternity leave, there was no-one to do it. Clustering smaller schools for languages could be the solution.

Moreover, the issue of implementing the subject in a *multi-grade* classroom, according to one principal, is something that would need to be dealt with for logistical reasons:

> PD: … this could be an issue for the implementation of the programme…like it is all ok the first year of teaching, but then you have 5th and 6th with one group after one year of language learning and the other group with no experience. Or 3rd/4th/5th/6th whatever…

One teacher made the point that *parents* may have issues with a school implementing the language:

> TA: Parents. I think you could have some approaches from parents "She is struggling with maths, or she is struggling with English how can they now learn French", you know? This will certainly need to be considered. How pupils with difficulties can be included and catered for in these language classes?

This theme of *pupils with special educational needs* was also reiterated by other participants:

> TB: You do have to take into account as well there could be special education means where is this going to put them in a position where they might be uncomfortable, maybe they don't like joining together with the fifth class, maybe they have enough going on—
>
> PC: If they're struggling with English and Irish in fifth and sixth class, is it wise to introduce another language at that stage?

The theme of *staff capacity* was prevalent among several participants:

> TA: --we wouldn't ask a teacher to organise something like that if the structure were not in place. The structure's [for] teachers who were in a position to teach MFL and secondly the lack of materials that a teacher could use. And thirdly perhaps that would be two teachers on board since two classes will be involved [in larger schools]. My experience would be that if those conditions weren't in place, a teacher would decline, mostly to be against it if they weren't safety net of materials and someone who could actually confidentially use the language in question.

TA: Yes, biggest barriers will definitely be staffing, and getting the time.

Certainly, the discussions developed broad parameters in relation to the challenges to be overcome before any primary MFL could be introduced. Concerns in relation to the subthemes of *time* and *curriculum overload* combined with other subthemes of *staff capacity*, teachers' *linguistic competence* and the support needed for professional development and subject implementation. Additionally, but no less important, were the subthemes surrounding smaller schools, *multi-grade* classrooms, *pupils with SEN* and potential reticence from *parents*. How these contentious issues relate to the literature, as well as the findings from the surveys and the other themes will prove interesting.

7.2.2 How can curriculum overload at primary level be overcome?

While the subthemes of *curriculum overload* and *time* were predominant through the focus groups, several teachers did identify ways to overcome the issue, with the subtheme of cross-curricular *integration* the main instrument identified to mitigate a full timetable:

> TE: Yeah it's not possible with today's curriculum and timetable. I think integrating the language with other subjects is the best way to bring it in.
>
> [TB: Whether they do it and implement the language, I just don't know. It would be hard to fit it in.
>
> TA: I must say that integrating the language seems like an area which could somewhat solve this issue?
>
> TD: Very, very, much so, but could work, history, art, P.E, geography, so much to integrate with.]

The subtheme of *Who to teach the language?* was conveyed by several participants, who felt that the weekly language routine would be easier to implement if the language teaching model involved a *peripatetic teacher* who would come into the classroom at a specified time every week; potentially presenting a solution to the *curriculum overload* issue:

> TA: If the teacher was brought in regularly and said every week they will be in at such a time, or someone was coming from France doing an hour every week it'd be great. But it's hard to fit it in otherwise.
>
> PF: But I like the idea of bringing in someone because then the whole massive issue of curriculum overload is worn out.

The place of the new *Primary Languages Curriculum* for identifying an integrated language learning experience was commented upon by several participants however no definitive roadmap for doing this was presented:

> PC: Or would it be that the language skills can be transferred and combined approach to take? So, it would really differ I think, from school to school. The Primary Languages Curriculum could be interesting here.

Discussions on how the MFL could be implemented in an *overloaded curriculum* drew varied responses from focus group members, with an emphasis on the theme of *Primary Curriculum and Curricular Issues,* noting potential changes that could be implemented. Several participants identified the need for a *reorganisation of the curriculum* to give 'space' for the MFL to be introduced:

> PG: What's going to be removed from the curriculum to [implement the language]?
>
> PG: Understanding that this was an agreement with the stakeholders is what's going to be removed from the curriculum to compensate.
>
> PH: Literacy and numeracy couldn't be touched. Outside of that any subject, or all could be reduced to make some way.

One teacher made the point that a more generalised time allocation for the *Primary Language Curriculum* might be useful in overcoming curriculum overload:

> PB: Is it going to require an adaptation to the, the timetable so our language subject is going to become a bit more generalised?

While others, felt that extensive planning, and even an evaluated pilot project on primary MFL could identify ways for alleviating an overcrowded timetable:

> PG: It would take planning…a lot of planning.
>
> PF: … maybe a pilot and evaluation…

Overcoming the main issue of *Time* and *Curriculum Overload* is obviously paramount from the participants' perspectives. Some felt that it was insurmountable, while others put forward practicable ways for it to be worked through, such as cross-curricular and inter-linguistic *integration*, making use of a *peripatetic teacher* who would come at a specific time every week, as well as the potential *reorganisation of the curriculum*.

7.2.3 How can teaching capacity be best developed?

A broad spectrum of ideas was put forward in order to identify ways for the subtheme of *staffing and staff capacity* to be developed.

Quite a few teachers suggested *staffing supports provided,* for example, someone in an advisory capacity working with the teacher, might help:

> TF: Maybe you could have a mentor or something so that the expert or advisor would help. Would they come in regularly? Would they be the ones to teach the language? Perhaps not. Maybe assist you for the first year, or maybe two years.

Several participants emphasised the role that *Initial Teacher Training* would have in developing teacher capacity, whether that is using the B.Ed. or Postgraduate route:

> PC: I think that languages would definitely have a place on both the B.Ed. and the postgrad programmes…
>
> TC: Perhaps an elective initially, building up the number of teachers competent in teaching the language before they go out into the workforce should be considered.

Ongoing opportunities for teachers to upskill in language teaching was very important for all participants, with a diversity of ideas put forward for its introduction:

> PD: Definitely in-service training is very important. Ongoing training. Not everyone will want to do a Postgrad in MFLs. Perhaps using education centres, sub-cover would be very important for teachers.
>
> TG: [The use of] Education Centres? … [If] somebody came and did in-service training or there were staff who went on in-service training.
>
> TG: Really the MLPSI should never have been scrapped. It worked so well in schools involved.

In one focus group, the idea of a mentoring system as a *staffing support* was suggested, combining the *peripatetic teacher* model with *CPD* in order to develop capacity within a school:

> TB: Would you think an external teacher to come in to teach the language would be better than a staff teacher teaching language?
>
> TD: Perhaps, initially, or maybe for the first year to--
>
> TB: Might take the pressure off.
>
> TA: It could be great for the teachers to develop more confidence.
>
> TC: Okay. What if they maybe worked in pairs that then you would pick up the language from them as well.
>
> TA: Yeah, like team teaching.]

In response to looking at a whole school approach to languages, one teacher made a point in relation to whole school implementation, that could have considerable effects on staffing and developing adequate teacher capacity:

> TA: So then you're going to teach that language in all classes of primary school. Because if you started with infants, do you stop at first class? Why? That means you have to have a teacher who was available to teach language classes across the school.

Several teachers presented their opinions that a certified training programme for teachers, e.g., *Diploma for MFL Teaching* could be useful for *CPD*, making various points about its potential for teacher professional development:

> [TB: Training for teachers will also be important whether they are the language teacher or not. Proper training though. A good postgrad maybe.
>
> TA: Exactly. One that could be funded, develop language skills and teaching methodologies.
>
> TB: That sounds great. I would very much enjoy doing that! It would be important to develop language skills. Perhaps linked to training abroad?]
>
> TH: I know people in my own school who did the Postgrad. I think it was in the IT? GMIT? I think it took two years and was a Postgrad Diploma in teaching the language?

Several principals made the point that the subtheme of *staffing and staff capacity* is something to consider when *recruiting and interviewing* new staff members, but with the caveat that the teacher should have actual expertise/qualifications in the language:

> PA: Plus, it is important to consider that process for employing a new teacher who has expertise in languages.
>
> [PC: What's happening, of course, is you know, you did earn your degree and postgraduate primary teacher tick the box. But having a clear understanding of what qualifies you to teach a language is important. Principals can keep an eye on this when they are selecting for interview.
>
> PA: Yeah. You can't have someone 'kinda' qualified for the job. Perhaps a diploma in MFL teaching.]

An interestingly constructive range of responses was conveyed on the topic of developing teacher capacity. From introducing modules or electives on the topic of primary MFLs into initial teacher education, to a certified CPD programme and developing a mentoring/support programme for teachers in classrooms, participants were generally of the opinion that this developing teacher capacity is realisable. Principals also focused on the point that when

recruiting new staff members, having a teacher that has the requisite experience/qualifications is something to consider.

7.2.4 What teaching approaches would be most appropriate to teach a MFL?

This was an area with considerable agreement among participants as to the subtheme of *teaching considerations, approaches and resources* that would be most suitable. Most participants suggested that the language learning be a positive experience for the pupils, through a variety of *active learning* methodologies, with more emphasis on *oral language and communication* for the language learning to be effective and enjoyable:

> TD: No major emphasis on reading or writing per se but you still learned some reading and writing through the interactive methodologies used, that is what we learned at first year and at sixth.
>
> TB: Just make it fun, interesting and enjoyable. It does make a difference. It does make a difference.
>
> TD: Yeah at primary level was constantly oral language…lots of games, chatting, songs, rhymes really fun and effective work. Brilliant really.

Additionally, several teachers emphasised the importance of pupil confidence and an immersive language learning experience, linking with pupils' interests, in order to nurture a love for language learning; inspiring pupils through the language learning, and broadening their horizons through learning about different cultures:

> TH: Yes. Developing confidence, using the language, like you said a living language. But using interesting and fun ways to teach the language.
>
> TG: Making it clear towards their interests. You're coming in and that's the topic of the day. It is about awakening a desire in the pupils, inspiring them to use a language and learning about cultures

Others felt that technology had a role to play in implementing the language programme and as a method would tap into the pupils' skills and interests, through use of various applications and specific ideas, but more teachers conveyed a more generic opinion:

> TB: I was just going to say, the use of IT, especially with the fifth and sixth because they're also tech-savvy with iPads and tablets--

Implementing the language with younger learners through integration with *Aistear* (the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework) became the topic of discussion in one focus group, especially the links to the Irish language:

> [TB: Yeah, I totally agree. Integrating with Aistear is something worth thinking about if we are talking the younger classes. We would need to look at the place of Gaeilge though in the younger classes and really the place of Gaeilge in the school as a whole.
>
> TC: Yes, and the younger they are the easier it can be to retain the language perhaps, whereas if it's in fifth or sixth class, it might take longer? You can even see the difference with Irish at that age. They know the phrases, the songs, the poems…]

Highlighting a *fun approach* and *pupil enjoyment* were the main subthemes from the focus groups in relation to teaching approaches. Making the language a 'living language' through less emphasis on reading and writing, with more on *oral language and communication*, *use of ICT* and linking with *Gaeilge* have all been recommended by participants as ways in which to develop confidence in the pupils. Integrating the language with *Aistear,* which was an idea posited by one participant, could be a way to introduce the MFL at a younger age.

7.2.5 Which language(s) do the participants identify as being the most suitable to teach in primary schools in the Republic of Ireland?

Essentially the responses to this question overlap with those from the research question pertaining to effective primary/secondary *transition*, with many participants focusing on what language(s) the feeder secondary schools may offer and how that may determine the *language choice* in the primary school.

> TB: But if it was me choosing the language my school I would definitely think about the secondary school in the area and what languages they offer. Because there's no point [in teaching] Portuguese with your 5th and 6th when there is no secondary school in twenty-thirty kilometre radius that does that. Not that it's all about the exams but at the same time if you are fostering this love of the new language you want them to have the opportunity to go on and continue study that once they leave this school.
>
> PF: Yeah…Spanish is a language that I would like to have in school for example, but the secondary school don't teach it? What do you do then?

However, there was disagreement with this line of thinking, with the language-learning process from primary to secondary, coming under scrutiny in terms of language choice, with one participant putting forward a different option:

> TA: I would disagree. Because if you do French for two years with the children of your fifth-sixth class, when they go to do French in the second school starting at zero again. So a lot of what they've done it continues for them and eventually the others will catch up. I wouldn't mind if they did a language like Portuguese that wasn't done in any school.

In one principals' focus group, this same point was discussed and drew the following interaction:

> [PE: Right now, you say a school could pick a language that doesn't link to the secondary school?
>
> PF: Yeah, that's possible
>
> PE: And you'd be happy with that?
>
> PG: Hmmm…hard to know I suppose I would be…]

Other participants conveyed variations on the above, with a whole school approach to the implementation of the language being forefront in their minds:

> TC: …some kind of maybe a five or three-year plan, a whole-school approach to languages, so the first year we might twin with Germany and teach German and then we would integrate the language across the curriculum for that time and the next year there might be a different class, with a different language?

One principal made the point that a school should only introduce a particular language that may be of more practical benefit for the pupils, or at least regarded as such by the pupils themselves:

> PE: Yeah, only look at languages that the kids will find some use in…a genuine use for it, means they might learn more?

The subtheme of *language choice* was not an area of consensus, with each participant almost looking at their own circumstances as being the major deciding factor. From their own experience of a particular language to the language of the local secondary school(s), as well as their schools' staff capacity in a language, many ideas were conveyed. Whether they are all practicable remains to be seen.

7.2.6 How can primary teachers' language proficiency/linguistic competence be developed?

In all the focus groups there was considerable emphasis on the subthemes of *teacher confidence* and *linguistic competence*, with a lack of consensus over the language proficiency standards required, as also the ways in which this could potentially be ameliorated over time. Several participants felt that planning would enable a teacher to identify their own language needs:

> TB: Maybe figure out what you want kids to achieve by the end of the curriculum or by the end of the fifth and sixth class and then what level of the language yourself right now. And then you can be more specific with your short-term plans.

Several of the participants identified ways to overcome language deficiencies through *CPD* opportunities. They give the example of *travel abroad* to attend teacher-specific courses in target countries in order to develop language proficiency among teachers:

> TH: During the summer you can apply for grant funding for a week in Spain or France or whatever for a teacher course, or there are always the Erasmus projects for schools? Plenty of ways to link with other countries.

One principal reinforced that the level of language training needs to be at a high level for primary teachers who wish to introduce and teach the language, taking the lead from the secondary level language teachers who are presented with various training opportunities:

> PF: In the country, I think that second level there's options for French teachers to—travel and upskill-- I mean they're really serious about this and if we are to do it, then we need to be immersed [in the language-learning experience].

One participant expressed their surprise and enthusiasm at the possibility of training abroad:

> [PA: Yes! Like travel? Training in other countries?
>
> PC: Wow, I never heard of these. What are they?]

Taking on board the option of a more formal professional development, it was asserted by one participant that it may not be appropriate for all teachers:

> PB: Ok, well a funded postgraduate course is one thing in terms of CPD but may not be for everyone.

Various ideas and opinions were conveyed in order to develop both teaching capacity and language proficiency. Ultimately however, the opinion of one principal did represent the broad agreement of participants:

> PB: Well if you combine all of that training, from teacher-training colleges all the way through to travelling abroad, that could work.

Teacher self-efficacy, in other words, a teacher's belief in their own ability to teach a particular subject, was very much a central issue in the focus groups, and language proficiency was the area which proved to be most important. Enabling a teacher and providing them with the requisite tools and training to implement the primary MFL would be, according to some participants, what could make the possibility a reality. Effective training would be required,

according to almost all. The options of funded professional development opportunities, both formal and abroad in the target country, proved to be interesting possibilities, although, it was noted that they might not suit every teacher.

7.2.7 What teaching model would best suit to teach a MFL?

Several variations on teaching models were discussed by the participants, with several potential versions being suggested. Despite the absence of a clear consensus, there did seem to be commonalities between opinions and ideas conveyed.

In terms of the most suitable model for introducing the MFL, it was felt that a *staff teacher* could lead its implementation:

> TH: I think I'd love the staff to see if there would be any expertise amongst the staff that maybe people would like to contribute if or not assist in the implementation

One principal reinforced the importance of identifying teachers that may already be on staff with the expertise and/or experience to teach the language:

> PA: I don't really look externally. I would look within the staff first and find out the potential for a staff member to take on the language. They know the pupils well, they won't cost any more, they can also have the expertise in language teaching.

In contrast however, another principal felt that it should not assumed in all schools that someone on staff would be available to implement the language:

> PB: Because the thing is…you may have someone on your staff who lived in Italy for five years or worked in France for a year, or studied it at college etc etc whatever…but not everyone has the luxury of this type of person on staff…

Most participants, however, put forward an external model as the best way for implementation, with a *peripatetic teacher* coming to the school, for practical, linguistic and methodological reasons. Many asserted that a *specialist language teacher* with specific expertise and experience in teaching the MFL would be the ideal scenario. Who that teacher might be, however, was not clear:

> TG: Yes. This is where it could be better to have someone come in. Their timetable is set out and they come in at certain times.
>
> PG: So we've had training in everything except foreign languages. And if you want to do it right, bring in somebody who was trained in a foreign language properly.
>
> TA: I'd certainly have an external teacher the first year but once the pupils have heard the language spoken properly…

TB: Perhaps have the use of native speakers as part of the system?

One participant did make the stipulation however, that if a *peripatetic teacher* is employed in the school to teach the MFL, it is important that they be a trained primary school teacher, as well as having the *linguistic competence*:

> TG: And also we will take the point to the teacher who would be doing it may not necessarily be the Fifth or Sixth class teacher would they have that expertise on the primary curriculum? Essentially should they be a primary trained teacher with someone with a language qualification.

Many of the participants felt that the practice of clustering schools for a *peripatetic teacher* would be most effective and practicable:

> TA: Best scenario that [clustering]. You think how many hours we could probably dedicate towards teaching 5th and 6th classes and cluster schools accordingly, allocating like a certain amount of hours to each school and a teacher with the expertise comes in to teach the language.

One principal agreed with the introduction of a *peripatetic teacher*, and made the point that it could essentially standardise the MFL teaching across schools in Ireland:

> PG: If I like the idea of maybe somebody externally coming in because then you have a standardisation of practice within the country.

Whether a staff member or a peripatetic teacher is used to teach the MFL, it must, according to one participant, be up to the individual school:

> PB: There may be someone on staff willing to give it a go. But the option to bring an external must be included.

In all the focus groups there tended to be a discussion about the model for delivery of the primary MFL. These discussions generally ended up with an almost-binary notion of someone on staff to implement the language or employ a peripatetic teacher with the requisite expertise and experience to teach the subject. Clustering schools with a peripatetic teacher was an extremely popular idea, especially with smaller schools, which would overcome the potential issues of staff capacity in smaller schools.

7.2.8 How can effective transition from primary to secondary be implemented with MFLs?

The importance of effective primary/secondary *transition* was mooted in each of the focus groups to varying degrees. Several participants focused on the learning practicalities, especially on the language(s) taught in the primary and secondary schools:

> TF: It will be a situation that parents may be looking at what languages are in the local secondary schools?
>
> PA: … it is important for pupils to understand that sometimes they may be feeding into a school that does not teach the language they have learned for 2 or 3 years. Or they may be going to a school to continue their 3 year's language learning…

Participants presented contrasting opinions on transition, identifying the need for appropriate planning in order to make the most of the language-learning experience when pupils reach secondary school, to avoid pupils being *more advanced than their peers* and becoming disillusioned and bored in secondary school.

> PF: [Transition] definitely needs to be planned correctly or pupils that knew the language would be bored after a while…

Other participants, however, argued against this opinion, asserting that any MFL learning from primary school had a positive effect on the pupils' experience in secondary:

> PH: Well yeah I agree…somewhat…pupils that I know that had learned some language were delighted to have a head start in French.

Other participants focused on the continuity of language learning from primary to secondary, with several putting emphasis on what can be achieved before secondary school and the importance of motivation to the language learning experience:

> TF: … depends on how much time you're given to this language in fifth and sixth. Really would be that much overlap? You have to say, ok you do it for maybe half an hour, twice a week., Do they use what they have learned? When they get into secondary school, will they really have that much already done?
>
> TB: Yes, definitely [transition] will need to be looked at to make the most of pupils that learned the language to further develop their knowledge and skills and motivation too.

Another issue of continuity was discussed by several participants, regarding the language from the feeder primary schools into the local secondary school(s):

> PF: Yeah…Spanish is a language that I would like to have in school for example, but the secondary school don't teach it? What do you do then?

Principals in their focus groups tended to be more specific about the ways in which they (would) implement an effective transition policy:

> PD: And school transition is an important thing to be aware of…important to have a strategy, you could be creative. Whether the idea of a secondary teacher coming and teaching the language, or at the very least the secondary schools liaising with the primary schools to see what has been taught.

An apparent consensus, however, was that for transition to be effective, it would be based on local relationships between schools, especially in rural areas:

> PC: … you really need to establish links with your feeder secondary schools, certainly more than exists at the minute. Local links would probably be better. Although general guidelines would be beneficial, although one size would definitely not fit all.

All participants alluded to the pivotal role that effective primary/secondary transition plays for pupils. There was consensus on the importance of localised links between schools, being more beneficial and practicable for schools. However, the role of linguistic continuity proved to be a bone of contention for some. For several participants, continuing the same language from primary to secondary was crucial, while others felt that the transferable language skills and love of language-learning were most important.

7.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, as well as the previous, it was clear that a wide variety of responses have been submitted by participants, with considerable data generated. Common ground was established in areas, with participants forthright in offering opinions. From the identification of barriers that need to be overcome, to constructive ways in which to implement the MFL, significant, reflective detail was generated through the discussions.

While this chapter looked at how the focus group data related to the research questions on a more perfunctory level, without researcher commentary or links from the research to the literature, the following chapter will provide a more immersed investigation, identifying the actual themes through a more nuanced analysis of the data. This examination will see the data from both phases of the research (qualitative surveys and focus groups) expounded under the emerging themes from the coding, based on the process as was outlined in Chapter 5. The chapter will also identify and present the tangible links from the findings to the empirical research discussed in the literature review. This should provide the necessary evidence to put forward recommendations and implications for policy and practice in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 8: ANALYSING AND SYNTHESISING THE FINDINGS

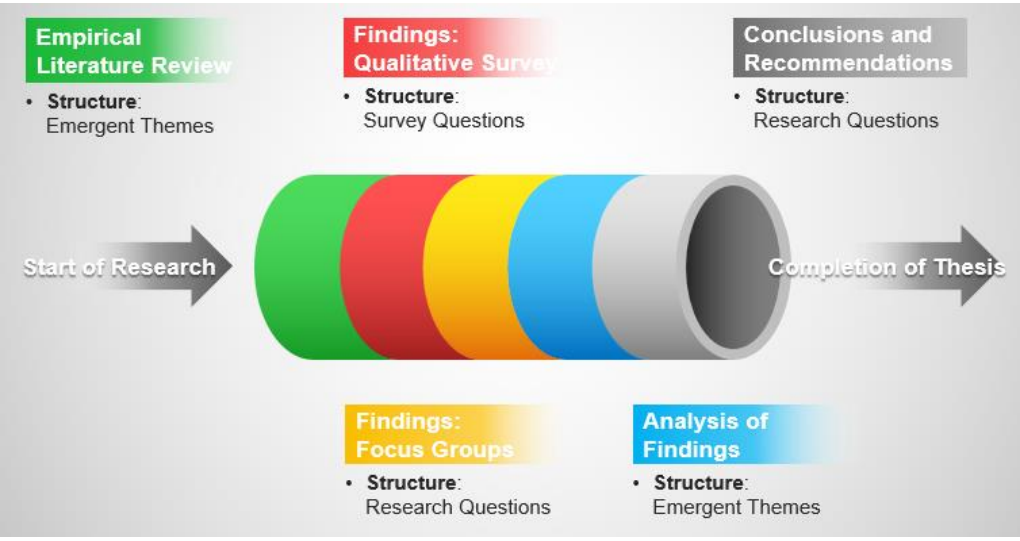
"We have to study man, and we must study what concerns him most intimately. That is, the hold which life has on him."

Malinowski (cited in Erickson and Murphy, 2010, p.196)

8.1 Introduction

This penultimate chapter presents an analysis and synthesis of the findings that were generated from both phases of the study: the qualitative survey and the focus groups. The aim of this chapter is to review and discuss these findings under the emergent themes, giving reference to the research questions posed in the first chapter, combined with the PGL and empirical literature reviewed in Chapters Two and Three. Differing fundamentally from the previous 'findings' chapters (Chapters 6 and 7), this chapter will clearly integrate and analyse the multi-faceted data that was produced from the surveys and focus groups, while presenting connections between the data and the literature. This will allow the reader to view the progress of this research story, identify key findings and understand their importance. Additionally, and crucially, readers are encouraged to understand, how the positionality of each participant may have determined their own viewpoints, attitudes and ideas about primary MFLs.

Figure 23: Telling the Research Story: Evolution of Chapter Structures

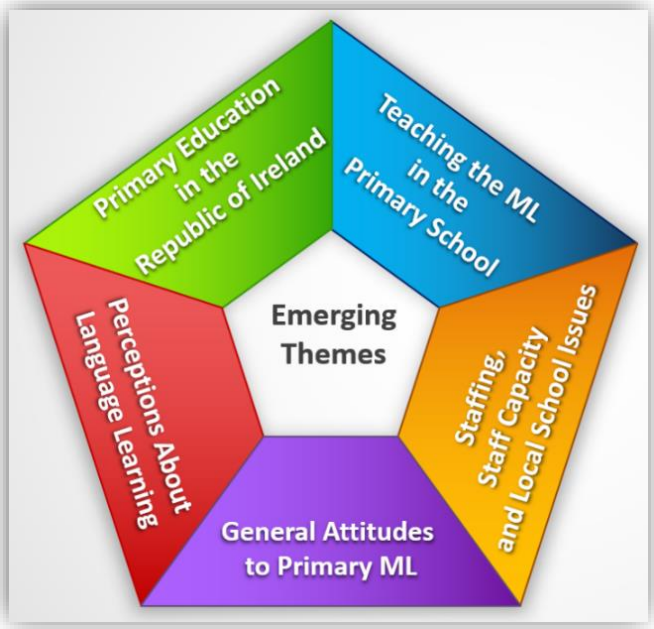


The iterative, two-part literature review was crucial in building a conceptual framework, which ultimately provided the initial structure for the gathering and organisation of the data.

However, the generation of findings, broadened out this framework from the initial literature reviews, as will be evident in the analysis of the findings. The initial gathering of perceptions of the four stakeholder groupings laid the foundations for the even richer data derived from the focus groups, regarding what the ideal conditions may be for introducing and implementing a MFL at primary level. While the structure of the empirical Literature review in Chapter 4, was by emergent themes, Chapter 6 was structured by the questions from the qualitative survey and Chapter 7 derived its structure from the research questions (see Figure 23).

The findings analysis in this chapter, however, both emulates and evolves the framework, and is organised around the overarching themes that have emerged from the research. In addition, several subthemes are discussed under each category. Before beginning the percipient analysis of the findings, it would be worthwhile to identify the results of the hierarchical analysis from the coding process. The hierarchical structure that was developed, was of great benefit to the data and its analysis and ultimately enabled the emergence of the key themes of the data. As a result, five 1st-level themes emerged from the data (see Figure 24).

Figure 24: Emergent Themes from the Data

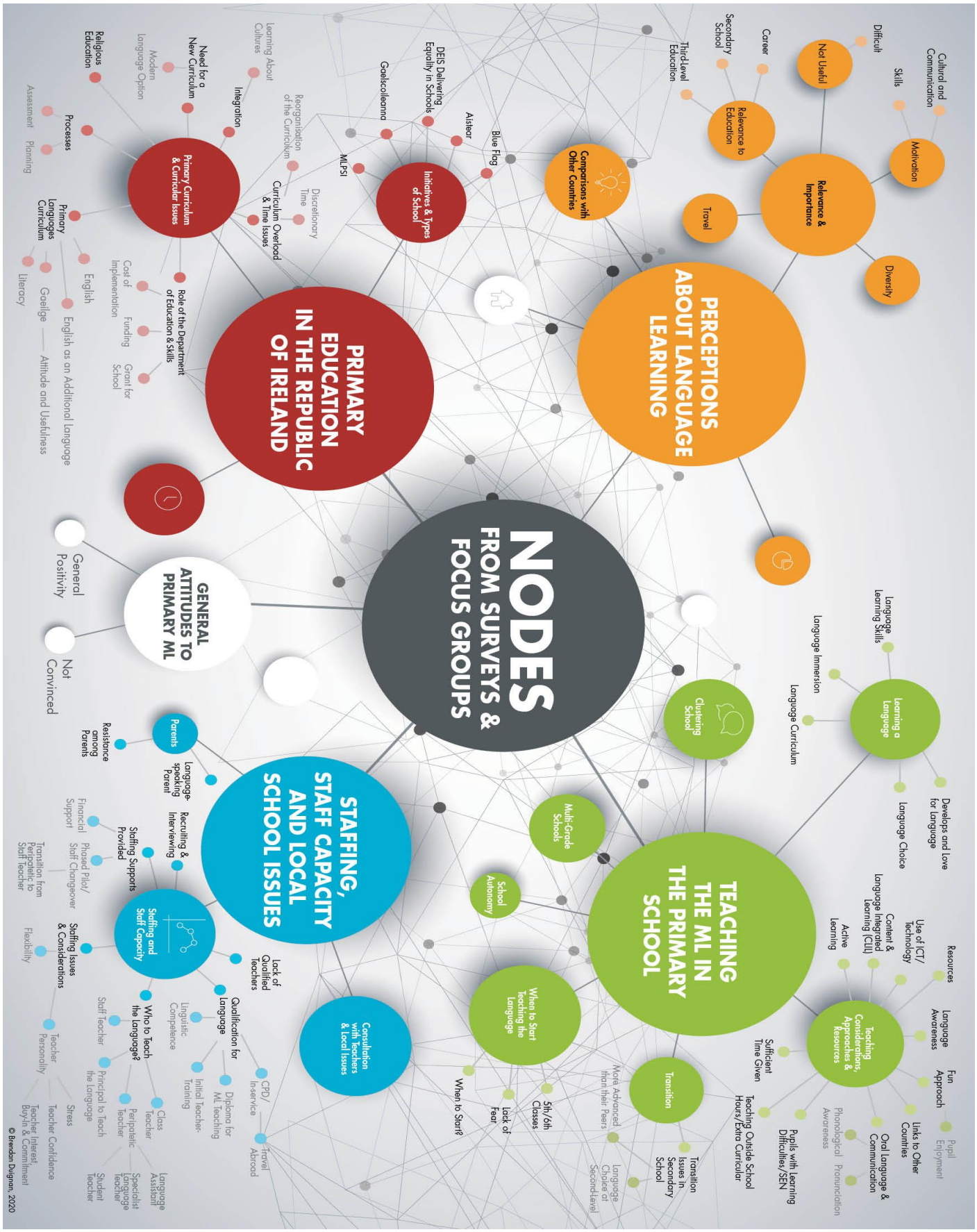


Additionally, by the end of the final coding cycle, a total of 107 subthemes emerged from these 1st level themes, which would be slightly unwieldy to present in text format. In order to best access and understand the way in which the themes and subthemes relate to each other, a

mind-map format was chosen as the most efficacious mode of visual representation (see Figure 25). The mind-map presents a clearer picture of the hierarchical nature of the coding process, from the main nodes that became the key themes, to the sequential nature of the various levels of subthemes.

The following sections of the chapter will present an analysis of the findings in relation to each key theme. The chronology of the chapter is based on what was considered the most appropriate for the spiral development of the analysis, i.e., that each section should build on the previous section, rather than any status, number of nodes attached, or perceived importance.

Figure 25: Mind-Map Presenting the Themes and Subthemes from the Coding Process



8.2 Analysing the Findings: Primary Education in the Republic of Ireland

The broad area of the primary education system in the Republic of Ireland, while being a crucial and overarching theme, produced only two key sub-themes from the coding process: '*Primary Curriculum and Curricular Issues*' and '*Initiatives and Types of School*'. However, the data generated under both the 1st -level sub-themes and subsequent levels have shown commonalities and noteworthy opinions and ideas. This section will highlight and discuss several of the most significant themes to emerge from the findings, including the issue of curriculum overload and ideas for overcoming it, the role of the Department of Education and Skills and how a potential MFL could be introduced into various types of primary school setting.

8.2.1 Subtheme: Curriculum Overload and Timetabling:

As so much of the empirical research has demonstrated (Tinsley/Alcantara Communications, 2019; McLachlan, 2009; Harris and O'Leary, 2007), the issue of an overloaded curriculum has been to the forefront in terms of barriers preventing the implementation of a primary MFL. This research echoed several of the findings of other studies, with 87 references in the teachers' and principals' surveys to either the lack of time, the question of fitting the subject into the timetable, or to curriculum overload directly. However, the subtheme as a current concern was significantly more prevalent in this study. It is referred to in all the survey responses from teachers *and* principals, and again, in all the focus groups, it became a topic for prolonged discussion: "*TB: It would be hard to fit it in*." Another teacher made reference to the subtheme in their completed survey but combined it with the expectations already in existence during an average school day, and the detrimental effects that it could have on a teacher's wellbeing: *"SR: With an already overloaded Curriculum, and all the demands made on a typical school day. Teachers might feel stressed by having to deliver a MFL at Primary level."* Such an opinion was not isolated, with another participant mentioning the overwhelming nature of the primary teachers' jobs in their survey:

> SR: I am convinced that exposure to a MFL at primary level is very desirable but I have to say that the current curriculum (with the new PLC [Primary Languages Curriculum] etc) is difficult to implement and assess properly. It is an overwhelming job at the moment for most classroom practitioners and I think that there isn't the time or energy for another subject.

These are significant responses and if introducing a new subject into the curriculum, especially one with such a clear skillset as a MFL, the teacher's well-being will be vitally important to monitor, and any anxieties will need to be dealt with both on a micro and macro level. Without these concerns being addressed and a willingness from the teachers, then the implementation of a primary MFL becomes merely a tokenistic subject, with no foundations to build upon into the future.

In order to overcome the significant barrier of an overloaded curriculum, there were a variety of options conveyed by participants. Several of the respondents to the survey felt that curriculum overload was an insurmountable challenge: *"SR: I don't think [it] can be [overcome] unfortunately."* While others found it could potentially overcome the timetabling issue by having the language taught outside of school hours *"SR: The curriculum is already over loaded so perhaps additional language learning might be extra-curricular?".* Such a decision would, however, negate the point of introducing the MFL as a living language and subject within the primary curriculum, allowing all pupils from all backgrounds to access the subject, without the need to pay for extra-curricular tuition. Cross-curricular integration was posited by several participants as the most practicable way of overcoming an overloaded curriculum, reaffirming the assertions from the research regarding the significant impact that the method has on the timetable (INTO, 2015).

Other participants felt that a change in the current curriculum would be necessary, either by removing or reducing the time allocation for a/other subject(s), *("SR: There is no way to overcome curriculum overload without removing parts of the curriculum," "PH: Literacy and numeracy couldn't be touched. Outside of that, any subject, or indeed all, could be reduced to make some way"*) or by a complete review of the programme *("SR: Completely overhaul the curriculum, no time allowed for extra language at the moment."*). Seven of the survey participants felt that either a reduction in time allocated to Religious Education, or removing the subject altogether, would provide the curricular space for introducing the ML, for example*: "SR: Reduce religion time to 3 sessions per week & introduce new language for 2 sessions."* While less than the under one-quarter of educators in Darmody and Smyth's (2017) research that "proposed the removal of faith formation and the promotion of one particular religion in schools" (p.23), it is nonetheless a point of note, and underlines the arguably diminishing role of religion in education. Given the current review of the primary curriculum and the draft

framework being released for consultation (NCCA, 2020), the latter may lay the foundations for primary MFLs.

The subtheme of *teaching model,* dovetailed with the subtheme of curriculum overload as several participants, especially in the focus groups, asserted that the teaching model that would be implemented could have a positive impact on curriculum overload, with the introduction of a peripatetic language teacher to the school: *"PF: But I like the idea of bringing in someone because then the whole massive issue of curriculum overload is worn out."* Participants, suggested that the status of the MFL in the primary school timetable would be maintained with a specialist language teacher coming in, to implement the subject in the classroom, affirming findings from Majoni (2017), who asserted that many teachers felt the employment of external teachers for certain non-core subjects would alleviate curriculum overload. This point is important to note, as it could potentially negate any possible extra paperwork, record keeping, and planning time needed for the class teacher and allow them time for their own classwork, corrections etc. One participant mentioned this model, that he experienced in the UK: *"TD: [The MFL teacher] covers the planning times so we each have to choose [what we do during] the planning time in England for two hours a week."* This is an interesting notion and one that could have possibilities for schools, especially in multi-grade classrooms. That said, when mentioned in a different focus group, one principal felt that it was perhaps too idealistic and might not work. Given its broader aspects, the subtheme of *teaching models* will be dealt with in more detail later in this chapter, in relation to the theme of *Staffing, Staff Capacity and Local School Issues*.

8.2.2 Subtheme: Role of the Department of Education and Skills

Given the remit for curriculum implementation and training given to organisations linked to the Department of Education and Skills (DES), this section will also look at the subtheme of the *role of the DES* in its broadest sense, specifically from the point of view of participants. The major role conveyed by many participants was that of funding and resourcing. One SR replied that *"It would be wonderful to have DES support for this worthwhile venture,"* which could suggest that the DES support is vital for the potential success of the initiative/implementation of the MFL. Another asked the more direct question *"SR: What financial commitment has DES proposed?"* While only six SRs mentioned this subtheme, it became much more of a concern for principals, since both principals' focus groups featured discussions in this regard. This is further

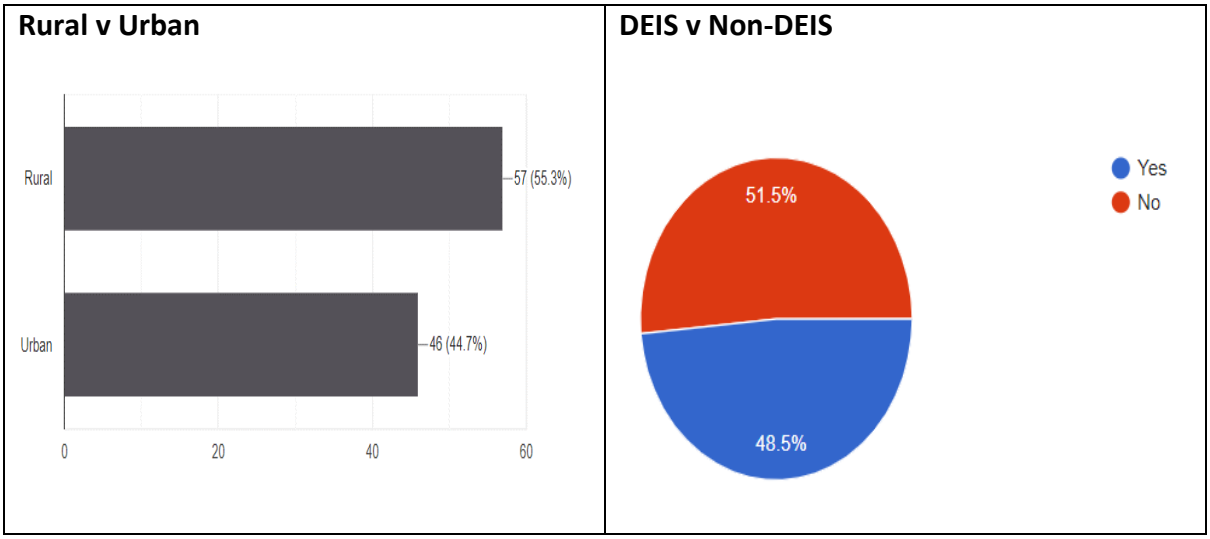
emphasised, and the importance of funding reinforced, by several focus group principals: *"PA: Resources provided or available can be really good. But they cost money. Funding will be very important for this. Plus training CPD and the like"* and *"PE: Yeah if it's gonna be introduced it'll need funding all round. Staffing and resourcing and training."*

How this could be implemented in practice, is quite interesting, with some participants identifying the need for a grant from the DES to purchase resources, as well as support in terms of training, and allocation of staff members to implement the new language. This will be examined in more detail when the subtheme of Teaching Models is investigated later in this chapter. The need for adequate resourcing supports Maynard's (2012) and Barton et al.'s (2009) assertions, that a combination of effective training, along with suitable resourcing, is vital in order to make the MFL a sustainable part of the primary curriculum. The key word here is *sustainable* since, realistically, the past has shown that resourcing and training have worked at a pilot/initiative level in Ireland (Harris and Conway, 2002). However, despite the successes, they were not sustainable on a national basis, for reasons not necessarily definitive (for example: curriculum overload, and insufficient support from stakeholders). This is crucial for the officials and policymakers to get it right, from the beginning, if sufficient support and 'buy-in' is to be acquired for the introduction, and sustained implementation of primary MFLs. As a result, the DES and their work will permeate through any potential introduction, whether through policymaking, funding, staffing, through the NCCA for curriculum development, or the teacher support services for training.

8.2.3 Subtheme: Initiatives and Types of Schools

The subtheme of initiatives in primary education will be examined in this section, along with a brief discussion on the types of schools that took part in the study. While not a quantitative study *per se*, as already featured, a selection of demographic data has proved to be worthwhile in highlighting key information. Participants from both phases of the research came from varying school profiles (see Figure 26 for teacher and principal survey data) with focus group participants' more specific school profiles presented and discussed in Chapter 6.

Figure 26: Data Identifying Participant School Profile



While the subtheme of *curriculum overload and timetabling pressure* was at the vanguard of all participants' minds in both research phases, there were several participants that highlighted, in addition to the lack of time, the overload of initiatives in the primary setting: *"SR: there is enough pressure on the curriculum as it is without another initiative that would require a commitment of time." "SR: The workload would have to be decreased, there are too many initiatives being brought out that fall back on primary teachers."* This affirms Hargreaves' (2008) assertion that the "proliferation of multiple initiatives" (p.24) equates to "initiativitis" (p.24), as well as echoing research conducted by Woodgate-Jones (2015), who compares "being inundated with initiatives with swimming against the tide" (p.104). However, there were certain participants who espoused positivity regarding initiatives and their role in integrating with the primary MFL. The subtheme *Aistear* is a case in point and will feature later in this chapter.

Another initiative that was mentioned by a participant was the Blue Star Programme, which linked to the subtheme of *intercultural competence*, since it was established in order "to foster better understanding and knowledge of the European Union and how it affects the lives of Irish citizens among primary pupils through classroom projects and activities" (Blue Star Programme, 2020). The respondent in question made the positive, useful and surprisingly unique point from the data, that integrating the MFL with the Blue Star programme could be a time efficient way

of implementing the new subject. Such an idea could link directly with Michael Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (1997), as well as Courtney's (2017) recommendation that an increased emphasis on what are essentially the subthemes of *Links to Other Countries* and *Learning About Cultures,* would be important for the pupils' language learning experience. However, it would be vitally important from the research, such as Driscoll and Simpson's (2015), that intercultural competence be included as a key element of any future PMFL curriculum, to develop understanding and empathy for cultural difference as had existed in the previous MFL programme (NCCA, 1999).

8.2.4 Subtheme: Gaeilge (the Irish Language)

The place of the Irish language has been cemented within the school system for decades and how it would potentially relate to the introduction of a primary MFL is worthy of consideration. The fact that this point was reaffirmed by participants, led to its development as a subtheme in the study. As the first official language of the country and a compulsory subject in the primary school curriculum since 1922, with the foundation of the Irish Free State (Ó Murchú, 2016, p.12), it has however, been taught in primary school settings, for the most part, as a second language to pupils whose first language is English (Harris and O'Leary, 2009). However, it is also the language of immersion in schools in the *Gaeltacht* (Irish-speaking) areas and *Gaelscoilenna*, which are Irish-medium schools in English-speaking areas. A considerable number of schools in the MLPSI were Irish-speaking schools of both types, mirroring "the entire primary school profile" (MLPSI, 2012, p.5).

How the MFL could potentially impact on the Irish language at primary level remains something of a mystery, with no clear, definitive answer from any research. Harris and O'Leary (2009) convey the unanswered question as to the potential impact on Irish, through the slight contradiction in their own findings. Irish, in their survey, was seen as one of the subjects most positively affected by the primary MFL (31% of respondents, p.8). However, Irish was also deemed to be the subject most negatively impacted by the MFL (18%, p.8). Given this inconsistent evidence, it would be unsurprising to see similar data in this study.

Many teachers asserted that the potential introduction of a primary MFL would impact on the subtheme of *Gaeilge* in primary schools. For some, it could have a negative influence on the Irish language, *"SR: Fear it might have a negative impact on Irish." "SR: for a variety of reasons If they're struggling with English and Irish in fifth and sixth class, is it wise to introduce another*

language at that stage?" Some participants voiced their general frustrations with languages, and one proposed an arguably radical way to overcome the overloaded curriculum: *"SR: It would be a mistake to add a third language while we're failing at two. Remove Irish from the Curriculum and perhaps it would create space for another language."* This opinion, however, was not echoed by any other participant.

On the contrary, one 3rd year student commented that the need to get Irish taught properly at primary level was more important than introducing a MFL, particularly in relation to primary/secondary transition:

> SR: well id like them to teach our own irish language first as I think that's more important at that age to be learning the basic as in some primary schools they lack being able to teach it to some extent which is proven difficult to some secondary students as they lack basic irish skills

Such a sentiment was echoed in a more direct, less nuanced fashion by another 3rd year respondent: *"SR: teach the irish language properly first and we'll talk about that later."* These powerful points resonate with one of the findings from research carried out by Harris and Murtagh (1999) across twenty schools, on the teaching and learning of Irish. Harris and Murtagh observed 40 Irish lessons and surveyed pupils and parents from the classes. In the study, they found that "Pupils' reactions to the Irish lesson, expressed in their own words, indicate that they often experience the materials and lesson content as boring, old-fashioned and repetitious" (p.307). Such a finding suggests that Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis is suggesting "a mental block, caused by affective factors ... that prevents input from reaching the language acquisition device" (Krashen, 1985, p.100). These affective factors of motivation, attitude, anxiety and self-confidence are evidenced in relation to the Irish language. It will be important to keep these in mind in respect of any potential introduction of a MFL. Creating an environment of motivating and stimulating teaching activities, and nurturing a love of language learning, will be crucial.

Additionally, Darmody and Daly (2015) found that "Irish is generally seen by primary and post-primary students as less interesting or useful than some other subjects such as English or Mathematics" (p.xiii), however one 3rd year SR, strongly felt differently: *"SR: irish is a part of our culture and it is very important and I believe it will fade away if something is not done about it."*

Participants in the focus groups did not just indiscriminately accept the potential status of a primary MFL relative to the Irish language, they even showed some frustrations with the national language, possibly echoing the contradictions found by Harris and O'Leary (2009):

> PA: How can pupils find Irish hard, too hard for some and then learn a MFL? How come? How can schools do that? If they're trying to bring back our Irish language? Are we conflicting and interfering with that by suggesting that approach?

One principal demonstrated some frustration with the potential implementation of the new language, but, once again, more specifically with the Irish language:

> PB: I mean, if we actually look at what's the worst return on investment in education I, I'm going to say it's Irish because they get whatever they get 40 minutes a day, five days, 180 days, every year, and you walk into sixth class, and they are not fluent, nor near it.

Other participants however, affirmed findings by Ó Duibhir and Cummins (2012) in relation to the subtheme of the *Primary Languages Curriculum*. In their research review, Ó Duibhir and Cummins investigated the rationale for its introduction in an Irish context and one of their key assertions is the *interdependence hypothesis* (Cummins, 1978). In essence, this asserts that when pupils are developing literacy skills in a particular language, e.g., Irish, they are not simply learning how to read and write in that language. "They are also developing a common underlying proficiency that enables the transfer of literacy skills and learning strategies to other languages." (Ó Duibhir and Cummins (2012) p.11). What this ultimately suggests, is that the introduction of a MFL into primary education would be an opportunity for developing English and Irish in education, which some participants affirm: *"PF: I think of the junior end in particular. I think it'd be great and the pupils would really engage with it [linking Irish and the MFL]"* and *"PH: But language learning, in general, is the more of an integrated thing than other subjects."*

Regarding the place of Irish in Irish-medium schools and its links to the primary MFL, one SR felt that:

> SR: Irish medium schools are ideal as a platform for introducing a MFL. Bilingual children are more receptive to a third & fourth language. Research shows that bilingual pupils are not unduly affected in standardised literacy & numeracy scores by learning through a second Language but also that they demonstrate increased levels of self-esteem & confidence.

This is notable and affirms findings from Harris and O'Leary (2009), that teachers from all-Irish schools were overwhelmingly positive about the benefits of previously learning Irish on the MFL learning experiences (92.5% of class teachers in Irish-medium schools p.8), as opposed to 49.4% of class teachers in English-speaking schools. 61.9% of class teachers were prepared to teach the MFL, or aspects thereof (p.11). Irish-medium schools, therefore, may have a pivotal role to play in developing a particular model of MFL teaching within their own context. Nevertheless, even though it could be argued that the place of the Irish language is a polarising issue within the education system, an integrated primary language curriculum, including English, Irish and a MFL could be reciprocally beneficial for all languages, as Ó Duibhir and Cummins (2012) have suggested. It already exists in the new Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2019), albeit currently only for the languages of English and Irish.

8.3 Analysing the Findings: Perceptions about Language Learning and General Attitudes to Primary MFLs

In order to maximise overlapping findings between the 1st level subthemes of '*Perceptions about Language Learning*' and '*General Attitudes to Primary MFL*,' it was decided to amalgamate them in this section. This will alleviate potential for repetition and be more efficient for the reader. Regarding general attitudes, there did seem to be an apparent positivity towards primary languages across the participants, as attested by the 97.2% of principals and teachers, along with 85.7% of the 6th class pupils and 90.5% of the 3rd year students all deeming the learning of a MFL to be beneficial. Again, these findings echo those of Harris and Conway (2002), for example, 84% of primary pupils that participated in Harris and Conway's survey agreed that they were 'glad' they began learning the MFL in primary school.

Interestingly, however, when asked about the potential introduction of a MFL into primary schools, these statistics change slightly, but noticeably, with a sizeable 10.2% of the principals and teachers stating that they believe that MFL should *never* be introduced at primary level, with 4.8% of the 6th class pupils in agreement. Strikingly, when compared to the other data, all the 3rd year students felt that it should be introduced. This finding could have occurred as a result of their experiences of learning the language thus far and their belief that it could help in preparation for secondary school.

8.3.1 THEME: Perceptions About Language Learning

This section will present participants' own perceptions and attitudes to language learning in general, and more specifically primary MFL learning. The reasons and justifications for learning a MFL will be discussed in a subsequent section, but it should be noted that there may be a tangible overlap between the sections. As in previous sections, there was a broad spectrum of responses from teachers and principals regarding language learning. These ranged from the extremely positive: *"SR: Primary school represents a window of opportunity for language learning,"* and *"3rd Year SR: I think is a special skill to be able to learn a language,"* to the slightly less optimistic *"SR: I don't doubt that learning a MFL at primary level would be helpful but I just don't see how it's feasible the way things are."* Some of the teachers and principals spoke from their experiences to convey both their own and their pupils' perceptions of primary MFLs: *"PC: …like I saw it [in] my own school, how much they really engaged with the language."*

> SR: I have worked as a Primary Teaching Principal for 14 years in Ireland and from my experience, there is a favoured interest and willingness to learn a MFL over our own Irish language. Children get excited about the idea of being able to speak another language when they go on a European holiday or when they engage in a Skype classroom activity.

These points corroborate the findings from Maynard (2012) who asserted that the pupils "thoroughly enjoyed the lessons" (p.2) and showed general positive disposition towards language learning at primary level. Additionally, from an Irish point of view, Harris and O'Leary found similar positivity from data in their research, as 84% of pupils felt that they were happy to have learned a primary MFL rather than wait until secondary school (MLPSI, 2012, p.40).

When it came to perceptions among teachers and principals, varying points of view were imparted. One teacher made the point in their focus group that learning a MFL in primary school would be important, as monolingual pupils need to be able to communicate and use the language but may not always be able to do so: *"TE: But actually --they're speaking English. Not necessarily used to speaking a different language so the kids need to learn how to speak another language and use it."* This is an interesting point to make, especially given the amount of time allocated to the compulsory learning of the Irish language in the primary school system (3 hours, 30 minutes per week (NCCA, 1999 p.70). It could be argued that the participant is indirectly questioning the teaching of the Irish language at primary level, particularly given that

a language is taught, in order to be used. This reflects opinions communicated by other participants.

Most of the participants in general, both across the survey responses and focus group discussions, were, or became, more positively disposed towards the language, for example: *"SR: I would love to see children have the opportunity to learn a MFL in their early school years. It would be so beneficial and we can see how it works so well in other countries."* There is a contrast here with findings from other studies, such as Woodgate-Jones, (2008); Maynard, (2011); Marques, (2017); and Finch, Theakston and Serratrice, (2018). These studies have found significant issues of demotivation among teachers with indifference, general negativity towards the MFL and its place in the school day, as well as language proficiency concerns. Perhaps, it could be argued in respect of the findings of this research, that the aspiration versus the reality can cause such contrasts. Some of these participants, however, are voicing their opinions from a grounded reality of having experience of teaching the language in primary school. Such concerns link directly to the issue of 'self-efficacy' (Bandura, 1997; Johnstone, 2003; Pattison, 2014; Waddington, 2019) among teachers and one of the trepidations that was conveyed in both the surveys and the focus groups was the combined issue of training and language proficiency (i.e., language teacher competency). Bandura defines self-efficacy as referring "to beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (1997, p3)." While not explicitly using the phrase 'self-efficacy' at any point in the study, several participants asserted the importance of language teacher competency, communicating their lack of confidence in the area of language teaching, and potentially that of their colleagues: *"SR: Teacher competence - many teachers have not used a MFL (other than holidays) since secondary school and may not be up to a relevant standard" and "SR: Teacher skill deficit."* One SR made a thought-provoking comment in relation to the same point: *"SR: Teachers feeling skilled to implement this."* This phrase "*feeling skilled"* affirms the importance of self-efficacy.

These findings echo Barton et al.'s study (2009), of teachers and head teachers, with reticence on the part of teachers about actually teaching the language due to their own lack of language proficiency and expertise. This, again, demonstrates the role of self-efficacy in teaching this (and potentially any) subject. Taking QCDA's (2001), Barnes' (2006) and McLachlan's (2009) research findings which highlighted teachers' issues with curriculum overload, deficient language skills and

lack of understanding of any potential links between literacy and learning a ML, this will need to be considered in the Irish context. It would be vitally important to scaffold teachers and schools through the process of introducing and implementing a MFL, through appropriate and ongoing supports, combined with effective training. This training could make use of the MLPSI model for CPD (MLPSI, 2012), which was a structured, modular programme, combined with evening courses, training conferences and international opportunities. The ongoing supports could potentially be a combination of teacher-trainer school visits, regional/clustered support groups, and ultimately the development of what Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991), and subsequently (Wenger (1998), coined 'communities of practice.' These communities of practice are essentially, as Wenger-Trayner (2015) defines, "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (p1)." Whether these communities of practice exist at school-level, local-level or regional-level, they can potentially provide an ongoing support network for teachers and schools. They will certainly have a place in the recommendations in Chapter 9.

8.3.2 Subtheme: Relevance and Importance

What became apparent through the coding process, was the various agendas from the different participant groups, under the subtheme of *Relevance and Importance*. Each had their own reasoning(s) for advocating primary language learning and it was interesting to see these reasons collated. Some of the teacher/principal participants, for example, felt that the motivation for teaching the language would be important to investigate before its potential introduction*: "PF: …I suppose we also need to look at why we are teaching the language…for academic reasons, cultural, career, college…"* From many of the SRs' responses, extrinsic motivational reasons were suggested as being important for learning a language, for example, career prospects, or transition to secondary level:

- Expansion of career opportunities
- Any interaction with a new language opens possibilities and prepares them for taking on a new language in secondary school.

Worthy of note, is the perceived positive influence that the MFL would have on other areas of the curriculum, especially English and Irish, as well as other subjects, and general learning:

Various survey respondents

- The younger they learn other languages, the easier it will be to learn Gaeilge etc.
- Generally considered easier to pick up a language the earlier you start. Could be helpful for teaching grammar concepts in English and Irish for the transfer of skills.
- It opens their minds and makes them more receptive to all learning.
- I believe that learning a MFL not only benefits children linguistically but has also other great impacts on children's learning in many other cross curricular areas and ultimately on their citizenship.

These points echo the primary MFLs proponent John Trim, who asserts that "MFL work can make a contribution to the general education of the young child and can enable him to develop a positive attitude towards other ways of thought and other cultures." (cited in Doyé and Hurrell, 2009, p12). Given the introduction of the Primary Languages Curriculum (for English and *Gaeilge*) (NCCA, 2018), and the Draft Curriculum for Primary School (NCCA, 2020) this will be important to keep in mind.

For many of the 3rd Year SRs, the subtheme of *travel* was an important reason for learning the language, with twelve coded references, for example: *"SR: i think it is very important as it is now easier then ever for people to visit other countries and it is important to learn the language. i know the improvement of technology may seem like a barrier but i think learning a language is a skill for life."* Another 3rd year participant asserted that learning the language is *"SR: Very important, as there are more people moving, living and working in other countries than ever before, this is a much needed skill. It will eliminate the language barrier."* Primary pupils from 6th class, however, while also acknowledging travel as a factor, highlighted the issues around primary to secondary transition as being their main motivation for language learning: *"SR: I would like to learn different languages in school so i don't fall behind in secondary school"* and *"SR: it could be fun useful and a head start for secondary school."* Two of the 6th class participants, also mentioned the relevance of MFL learning for getting a job.

What these responses demonstrate is the *motivation* behind the participants' rationale for language learning. Yamamoto (2016) reasons that this subtheme is a significant issue in education and realistically, this will need further examination before introducing the subject into the primary classroom. As Ng and Ng (2015) assert "Motivation has been widely accepted

as one of the key factors that influence success in second/foreign language (L2) learning (p98)." Lanvers (2017) agrees and posits that primary school pupils (aged 7-11) demonstrated high levels of intrinsic motivation through enjoyment of language learning itself. Martin (2012), had similar findings, citing high motivation among pupils towards MFL learning at primary level. Such findings could be linked to Gardner's `socio-educational model' (Gardner, 1985), which, it could be argued, has been at the forefront of research in motivation (Williams, Burden and Lanvers, 2002). Gardner's model integrates cultural views of the language learner, their motivation and their language learning attitude. Gardner defines motivation, in a research context, "as consisting of desire to learn the language, motivational intensity and attitudes towards the learning situation" (Williams, Burden and Lanvers, 2002, p.505). Taking all this research in combination, Wu (2008) makes the important point, and one which will need to be kept in mind if introducing the MFL, that the pupils will need a combination of both extrinsic motivation, which teachers can initiate through feedback, rewards etc, as well as intrinsic motivation, which will need to come from within the pupil themselves.

Interestingly, under the subtheme of *Not Useful,* when it came to reasons why a MFL should not be introduced at primary level, some worthwhile points were conveyed from the 6th class and 3rd year participants. For two participants it was proposed to be too difficult, Another two suggested that primary pupils were too young to learn the language, while another felt it would prove to be a strain on their studying workload. Additionally, one 3rd year participant felt that *"SR: Primary school students should focus on core subjects in primary school."* Strikingly, one 6th class participant put forward an opposing view on travel as motivation: *"SR: cause it's not like I'm going to live in france spain."* These findings support those from Tierney and Gallastegi's (2011) Scottish study which found considerable negativity among pupil learners. It is worth noting, however, that several of the studies focusing on pupil perceptions have found considerable positivity (Harris, 2004; Maynard, 2012; Chambers, 2019), and realistically there will generally be a cohort of pupil participants that may have negative opinions on the topic of the school-related survey.

8.3.3 Subtheme: MLPSI

Without necessarily restating the discussions from Chapters 1to 4, the MLPSI was the sole official experience that any primary school in the Republic of Ireland would have had with MFL teaching and learning. During the research, almost every mention of the MLPSI from

participants expressed enthusiasm, for example, during the survey*: "SR: The abolition of the MLPSI was an extraordinary setback,"* and:

> SR: I taught German as part of the MFL in primary school pilot project. Children enjoyed learning about their peers in Germany and their traditions. It is a great pity this initiative was suspended."

This positivity was further asserted during the focus group discussions, with both participants from both teacher and principal focus groups making positive reference to the initiative: *"PA: I have to say from my own experience, all of the pupils really engaged with the language during the time with the MLPSI." "TE: Yeah in my class they did enjoy it [the MLPSI/Language Learning experience]."*

This data directly echoes that of the two-part independent evaluations by Harris and Conway (2002) and Phase 2 by Harris and O'Leary (2007), who found a positive and constructive experience was had by the stakeholders with 93.2% of principals and 89.6% of class teachers having favourable attitudes to the teaching of the ML in their own schools. The findings also echo the view that the MLPSI "…succeeded in installing a teaching programme which has a significant emphasis on communication, an experiential orientation to learning and a focus on pupil enjoyment of the learning process (Harris, 2004 p50)." In this regard, most pupils, according to Harris and Conway (2002), had developed positive attitudes to their MFL learning experience, with 84% of pupils stating that they were glad to learn the MFL.

Notably, despite significant numbers of the MFL teachers having no previous experience of teaching the MFL, they were very satisfied with the support system and CPD provided by the team of Project Leaders. However, there were some findings that highlighted elements of the MLPSI that could have been better in individual circumstances. One SR stated, for example, that despite the initiative being a welcome introduction to the language for secondary school, there were difficulties in the pupil-teacher relationship:

> SR: … the students didn't like the French teacher and I think it put them off choosing it as a language when they went to secondary school.

This same issue was also conveyed by another participant, who, once again, showed enthusiasm for the MLPSI, but suggested that there was a slight staffing issue:

> SR: Worked well but there was an occasion where visiting teacher for one term had little experience of teaching a full classroom of primary-aged students. This affected the learning at times.

Despite, these comments, the general enthusiasm around the MLPSI, and its effects on primary MFL learning demonstrates the potential within the system. Whether or not the re-establishment of the MLPSI, rather than a national implementation of primary MFLs would be better remains to be seen, but there is potential for success in the former. Examining the best way to develop staff capacity whereby the language teacher is also a qualified primary teacher will be important.

8.4 Analysing the Findings: Teaching the MFL in the Primary School

Interestingly, it was this theme that produced the most subthemes from the data (32), which suggests a broad spectrum of responses, attitudes and ideas from all the participants. Many of the practicalities of introducing a MFL into the primary school were discussed; from when is best to start, to teaching considerations, methodologies, curriculum and transition. The theme provided constructive, considered and thought-provoking findings from participants and will be presented in distinct sections, beginning with an examination of findings regarding when best to introduce the language. Many of the findings demonstrate Al Darwish's (2018) assertion that, "Teaching is a very personal activity, and it is not surprising that individual teachers [*and I would include students*] bring to teaching very different beliefs and assumptions about what constitutes effective teaching" (p.1).

8.4.1 Subtheme: When to Start Teaching the Language?

The Age Factor in language learning, has been, as already discussed in Chapter 4, something of a conundrum for experts, as Singleton (1995) pointed out, "…a certain amount of intra-researcher variation (p.2)." Whether or not the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) is a credible theory has been debated among researchers for years (Penfield & Roberts, 1959; Lenneberg, 1967; Huang, 2015). However, in this study, many of the opinions from teachers and principals were very much advocating early language learning, putting forward a variety of experience-led evidence for their opinions, for example, "*SR: Children are more receptive to learning other languages when they are younger. They are less self-conscious using drama /role playing different situations in a different language when they are younger."*

The research does not consistently support this assertion, however. Jaekel et al. (2017) for example, query the positivity that is assigned to early language learning generally, asserting that "…despite the common belief that younger learners are better language learners, research has consistently shown that older learners make faster progress in classroom language learning" (p.19). The study found that the two-year head start had closed by the age of 12-13 years old.

Myles and Mitchell's (2012) study of MFL learners from ages 5 to 12 found inconsistent results among age-groups, but significant enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation for MFL learning among the younger learners. Additionally, researchers such as Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle, (1978), as well as Dulay and Burt, (1982) found that younger learners ultimately outperform older learners over the longer term.

While there were a considerable minority of mentions, especially in the surveys, of the fact that primary school may be too early to introduce a MFL, the main debate developed around when, within the primary school lifetime, should it be introduced? Both principals and teachers put forward their arguments for introducing a MFL at a younger age than had previously been the case in the MLPSI (5th and 6th classes):

> TC: I agree because they pick up the language so much quicker at a young age. Like if you think even before at the age of five or six how quickly they are picking up English.
>
> PE: Sure do we have to start with 5th and 6th could we not start earlier?
>
> PA: Certainly in my experience, earlier can most certainly be better.

It is important to note is that some of the participants throughout the two phases of the research establish responses through their own experiences as educators, e.g.*, "PA: Certainly, in my experience."* While merely anecdotal and with no evidentiary support, it should still retain some professional credibility, as it is grounded in their own educational reality. An interesting exchange in another teachers' focus group opined with similar positivity, although with specific justifications, including time, attitudes and social development:

> TE: …the best class to and recommend this with should you start from the juniors and work it through the school. It would be just my thinking, honestly.
>
> TG: Yes, it's more like it. Junior side could be much better to implement it initially?
>
> TE: Yes for social development maybe? Not as unwieldy a timetable? Not as many expectations and no major attitude issues?

This positivity towards early language learning was echoed in some of the survey responses as well:

> SR: I would love to see children have the opportunity to learn a MFL in their early school years. It would be so beneficial and we can see how it works so well in other countries
>
> SR: Exposure to MFL at an early age will develop skills to broaden understanding of root words and apply language skills to each language

These points reflect research which found that metalinguistic skills can develop and improve through early language learning (Kirsch, 2012), as well as Tinsley and Board's Language Trends (2015) findings, which emphasised improved communication and linguistic skills. It is worth keeping in mind, that, as Larson-Hall (2008) posits, "The 'younger is better' phenomenon has no guarantee of applying in situations of only minimal input" (p.36) and for significant progress to be made with this 'advantage' of an early start, considerable thought would need to be given to the amount of time allocated to the MFL, regardless of the starting age. That said, however, Larson-Hall (2008) found in her research on Japanese learners of English, that there was "a beneficial effect for starting to study a language at a younger age, even when input is only minimal" (p.59).

Interestingly, while generally in favour of the early start for primary MFLs, three of the 3rd year respondents felt that primary school was too early to introduce a MFL. They felt that *"SR: three languages might be a little too much at such a young age," "SR: they should focus on core subjects in primary school"* and another 3rd year felt that introducing a primary MFL would put "*SR: more of a strain on them for studying and homework*." Additionally, two of the 6th class participants agreed: *"SR: children i think are still to young even in 5/6th"* and *"SR: no it is to hard."* Whether these opinions have something to do with motivation, special educational needs, or the workload on primary school pupils, is uncertain, however what is important to

note, is that curriculum overload might not just be a teaching issue, it could also be a learning one.

Given the various opinions and assertions found in the data, most of the participants favour the primary start to the MFL, however consensus after that on the micro-issues, is much harder to discern and will prove to be difficult if introducing and implementing a new programme. These considerations, and those of the minority in the research, will have to be taken into account.

8.4.2 Subtheme: Teaching Considerations, Approaches and Resources (including Multi-Grade schools)

On the topic of how best to teach the MFL, the data from participants demonstrated several subthemes, from the teaching approaches and resources used, to the motivational methods adopted. Across both phases of the study, there was a noteworthy mix of opinions.

Regarding the importance of selecting the most effective methodologies, participants placed an emphasis on oral language, real communication, as well as enjoyment and fun for the pupils, as evidenced in several teachers' opinions, e.g., "*TG: Making it clear towards their interests. You're coming in and that's the topic of the day. It is about awakening a desire in the pupils, inspiring them to use a language and learning about cultures."* Jones and McLachlan's (2009) point regarding the importance of embedding the PMFL into the school day was reiterated by one participant: "*TF: It's organic. It should be in the class more than just language time.*"

These points are notable for the inclusions, but also for the lack of specificity regarding methodologies and approaches, in common with much of the empirical literature. Interestingly, on this point, one teacher, who had experienced the MLPSI and primary MFL learning as a pupil, expressed their feelings on the experience: *"TD: Yeah at primary level was constantly oral language…lots of games, chatting, songs, rhymes really fun and effective work. Brilliant really."* This echoes Maynard's (2012) assertion surrounding language teaching, that the emphasis should be on "language use and children should be taught to communicate" (p.10). It also illustrates Al-Darwish's (2018) point that "Teaching is a very personal activity, and it is not surprising that individual teachers bring to teaching very different beliefs and assumptions about what constitutes effective teaching." (Al-Darwish, 2018, p.1).

The responsibility of the teacher to make the experience a stimulating one: *"TC: and that's up to the teacher to motivate and inspire the learning, making it interesting."* leads to an increase in motivation among pupils (Maynard, 2012). Some felt that this could be achieved through making tangible links to the target country, which can develop a combination of intercultural awareness as well as communicative competence:

> TA: So the idea of linking with the country to our school, our class in our country seems to be a common denominator and it's one that is possible when you're saying the limits would be a syllabus and a teacher with sufficient language ability.

Several considerations would certainly need to be examined for progress to be made in terms of implementation:

- The development of a practicable curriculum for primary MFLs, possibly integrated with the Primary Languages Curriculum
- A 'one-size fits all' (TD) approach would not work for all school circumstances, ("*TD: Absolutely. It won't be a one size fits all"*) especially when implementing the language in a split-class, multi-grade situation, where four or more class grades could be in the one classroom. Specific, realistic guidance would be needed on how best to implement the language in such settings: "*TA: It isn't easy…you'd have to prepare…It's the curriculum and finding the time to do a lesson regularly. I always found it a challenge, especially with multi-grade classes*."
- The importance of grant-funding to purchase resources, without over-reliance on a single book for pupils to work from

How pupils with special educational needs (SEN)might be affected by the introduction of the modern language, is something that emerged from the findings, with varying degrees of opinion. For some of the participants, it could pose a significant challenge but for differing reasons:

> TB: You do have to take into account as well there could be special education needs where is this going to put them in a position where they might be uncomfortable
>
> TA: How pupils with difficulties can be included and catered for in these language classes?

In England, the Training and Development Agency (TDA) for schools produced a support document on including pupils with SEN into the MFL lessons, giving this advice:

> To make MFLs lessons inclusive, teachers need to anticipate what barriers to taking part and learning particular activities, lessons or a series of lessons may pose for pupils with particular SEN and/or disabilities. So in your planning you need to consider ways of minimising or reducing those barriers so that all pupils can fully take part and learn. (p.6)

Interestingly, Tinsley and Board's Language Trends Survey from 2015 (648 schools), found improvements in the inclusion of pupils with SEN at primary level, while Marsh (2005), found that across Europe, pupils with SEN "…can both enjoy learning a language and progress linguistically, socially and culturally (p.20)." Ensuring SEN pupils are given ample opportunities to learn the language will be important to keep in mind. As a barrier to the primary MFL, it is not insignificant, but not insurmountable.

One survey participant made reference to CLIL as a potential methodology to overcome a variety of barriers to MFL implementation. CLIL, or Content and Language Integrated Learning has been defined "as a dual focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language" (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010, p. 1). It is currently a recommended methodology by the NCCA for the Primary Language Curriculum (Primary Language Curriculum Support Material: CLIL) and has been advocated by the MLPSI as a way of integrating the MFL into the primary school curriculum for many years (Dillon, 2009). This could potentially be another way of overcoming the curriculum overload issue but would certainly require effective support and training.

8.4.3 Subtheme: Transition from Primary to Secondary

Primary/secondary transition has been a concern in so much of the empirical literature (Jones and McLachlan, 2009; Jones, 2010; Courtney, 2017) and in this study, the issue was very much evident, as one SR asserted: *"SR: A foundation at primary level only if its followed through to second level would be beneficial."* When examining the findings from the study, it was evident that many participants felt that planning for transition needed to take place: *"PA: Good, because when they go to first-year they need so much more…the transition needs to be properly planned for?"* This affirms findings from Hunt et al. (2005). One of the teachers spoke in their focus group about how this may be done:

> TA: … it would be important to talk to staff and set down what language would be taught, link to the secondary school and just see how they plan it, how they've got to position where there are regards curriculum, planning, resources and teaching, there's the importance of transition…

Such planning would need to be made in the context of acknowledging previous language learning experience. Researchers such as Powell et al. (2000) and McElwee (2009), maintain that result of teachers' failure to capitalise on previous language learning can ultimately lead to demotivation on the part of pupils.

In order to develop these links, some participants suggested that links between the primary school and the local secondary school(s) would need to be established in a variety of creative ways:

> PD: And school transition is an important thing to be aware of…important to have a strategy, you could be creative. Whether the idea of a secondary teacher coming and teaching the language, or at the very least the secondary schools liaising with the primary schools to see what has been taught.

In Tinsley and Board's Language Trends Survey (2015), they found that when such localised, reciprocal relationships are established, whereby local secondary schools offer language teachers to their feeder primary schools, successful transition can take place.

Another principal concurred to an extent with this opinion, but sought some official guidelines on the issue:

> PC: … you really need to establish links with your feeder secondary schools, certainly more than exists at the minute. Local links would probably be better. Although general guidelines would be beneficial, although one size would definitely not fit all.

The issue of continuity was emphasised by the 6th class and 3rd year SRs, with five references to the language's importance for secondary school, from the eleven 6th class pupils, and ten references to the language's importance for secondary school among the eleven 3rd year students. One of the primary respondents put it succinctly: *"SR: it could be fun useful and a head start for secondary school,"* while one of the 3rd years conveyed a similar opinion: *"SR: yes because we learned Irish in primary school and going into secondary school it wasn't hard but starting off learning a totally new language was."*

While it has been asserted that planning and developing links between schools was vitally important, the issue of continuity and language choice is certainly an area of concern, with one principal voicing their disquiet regarding what happens when you learn one language at primary level, which is not continued into second level.

> PA: …it is important for pupils to understand that sometimes they may be feeding into a school that does not teach the language they have learned for 2 or 3 years. Or they may be going to a school to continue their 3 year's language learning…

Identifying all the key elements of MFL transition in each primary school, as Jones (2009) stressed, needs "to be carefully planned to ensure continuing motivation and progression as part of a successful cross-phase learning experience" (p.30). Continuity of language choice may not always be possible locally, as asserted by PA above.

An interesting exchange, extends this point, raising three issues: language choice, parental involvement and continuity in transition:

> PG: Yeah. Whether the parents want one language or another…or the secondary school teaches which language…?
>
> PF: Yeah…Spanish is a language that I would like to have in school for example, but the secondary school doesn't teach it? What do you do then?
>
> PG: Learning any language is the important thing though surely-
>
> PE: Yeah but parents may or may not see that-

The point is also asserted by teachers in their focus group, one of whom states:

> TG: A lot of thought is needed. You would need 100% of the kids having had access to the same language. There is a --maybe it will influence choice. When you've had couple of years of a language in primary school you may want to continue it. It was a positive experience.

The idea of localising MFL learning, with pupils continuing to learn the same language for a prolonged period is certainly the opinion of almost all the focus group participants. Interestingly, one teacher vehemently disagreed with the language of the feeder secondary school determining the primary language, and felt that selecting a completely different language in the primary school would be more beneficial to the pupils:

> TA: I wouldn't mind if they did a language like Portuguese that wasn't done in any school. And then to commute to a new language like French

> which is related to it and they can use new skills and climb the ladder quickly and competent in French, even if it not Portuguese…

Ultimately, quite specific elements need to exist when it comes to effective transition, and studies such as that of Bolster, Balandier-Brown, and Rea-Dickins (2004), found that these concerns did not exist in the early 2000s with the "lack of liaison, lack of information, lack of assessment and recording at primary, and lack of differentiation at secondary level, all led to a situation where pupils' prior learning was completely ignored". (Bolster, 2009 p234).and McElwee (2009) agree, citing that progress in language learning was hindered as a result of demotivation, due to a lack of differentiation and content repetition post-transition. Such points need to be taken under advisement, and in combination with feedback from stakeholders before any successful implementation could be envisaged. Clear, practicable, official guidance will be pivotal.

8.5 Analysing the Findings: Staffing, Staff Capacity and Local School Issues

8.5.1 Subtheme: Staffing and Staff Capacity

In terms of who should teach the MFL, in school there was considerable variety in responses from participants in both phases of the research. The data showed no marked or clear consensus as to the model which should be implemented, and one participant's view that *"TD: It won't be one size fits all*" in terms of implementation, could certainly be applied to the staffing issue. This could have planning consequences for the DES if introducing the primary MFL. As presented in Chapter 4, the data showed something of a dichotomy of the class teacher teaching the language, versus the staff or a peripatetic teacher (by which is meant any teacher from outside the classroom, whether or on staff or not). This reflects the literature, and in fact the model during the MLPSI (MLPSI, 2012), used a mix of staff or peripatetic (SoP) teachers and class teachers to implement the MFL programme, employed directly by the school from funds provided by the DES (MLPSI, 2012).

For some participants, both teacher and principal, it was important to look at the potential staff capacity to teach the language as a first step: *"TF: I would look into [the] staff to find the staff [to teach the language]"* and *"PA: I don't really look externally. I would look within the staff first and find out the potential for a staff member to take on the language. They know the pupils well, they won't cost any more, they can also have the expertise in language teaching."* In these terms, most of the teaching/principal participants were of the same opinion, that an audit of

staff capacity could potentially be the first step, but with the option of employing a peripatetic teacher if there is no staff member to teach the language:

> PH: … I'm talking about clusters for small schools for example. Also it is useful to know the background of the staff. Some bigger schools had one or two or three staff members that were competent to teach in the language that the principal had no idea that was brought to the staff.

Participants from smaller, multi-grade schools were clearly conveying the importance of employing a peripatetic teacher as there may be less chance of having someone qualified to teach on a much smaller staff. One Principal asserted this quite articulately:

> PC: Also, remember the majority of schools are multi-grade. Smaller schools which may not have the staffing numbers of bigger schools. While someone MAY be available on staff to teach the language, chances are there may not be. An alternative for staffing for smaller schools would be vital.

Using a clustering model, as exists in SEN in Irish primary, was posited as a potential panacea across the board. In larger schools, one staff member might not be able to cater for several language classes, as well as potentially already having their own role or class within the school. Potentially, allocating a number of teaching hours to a school based on their numbers could be the most equitable way to implement the programme across all types of primary school.

Many of these findings on staffing and who would be the most appropriate to teach the language echoes elements of the empirical literature. Driscoll (1999) for example, attributes advantages to each individual teaching model, with the specialist having the linguistic competence and confidence, but not necessarily the classroom management of the class teacher. Arad Consulting (2010) found that a potential mix of models, primary-led, secondary-led and peripatetic could be sustainable across the primary school system, with concurrent and sufficient investment in developing specialist primary MFL teachers. Whoever should be employed to teach the language, Driscoll et al. (2004) assert that subject knowledge is crucial for the language teacher to teach PMFL effectively. This professional expertise "encompasses linguistic and cultural knowledge, pedagogic knowledge, knowledge of resources and knowledge of children's learning needs, and how to teach them" (p.47). It does not preclude any teaching model from being adopted but is related to the key subtheme of *Qualification for Language*.

8.5.2 Subtheme: Qualification for Language

What determines whether someone is qualified to teach? In Ireland, according to the Teaching Council website (www.teachingcouncil.ie), "only teachers who have met the registration requirements of the Teaching Council are allowed to teach in state-recognised Primary and Post-Primary schools." This means that any schools who employ a teacher to teach the language, whether that is a staff teacher or a peripatetic teacher, must ensure that they are qualified. However, this important point did not seem to be clear to the research participants, the majority of whom, asserted that while being qualified was vitally important, it was not clear as to what determined 'qualification' to teach the language. From a parent who is from the target country to a staff member who lived in the target country, lots of ideas were presented, again with no real consensus. However, the law in this country makes this aspect a moot point, as qualification means officially qualified by the requirements of the Teaching Council. Teaching a language, however, requires additional expertise and according to many of the participants, this could take a variety of guises:

- Studying the language to Leaving Certificate level (end of secondary school)
- Formal qualification, e.g., university degree (or part thereof) in the MFL, postgraduate qualification in the language/language teaching etc
- Living in the target country and acquiring the language

While someone can be qualified to teach in a school, what determines a language teacher to be specifically qualified became something of an issue for many participants: *"TE: Yeah. It's hard to know what determines whether you can teach the language"*

> PC: … you did earn your degree and postgraduate primary teacher tick the box. But having a clear understanding of what qualifies you to teach a language is important. Principals can keep an eye on this when they are selecting for interview.

When examining the survey responses from both the 3rd years and 6th class respondents, it was very much apparent that the latter group put little emphasis on the qualities of the teacher, with no reference made, while the former made it their most important point in answer to "What changes would need to be made?" Eleven of the twenty-one respondents felt that the suitability of the teacher was paramount. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that they have experience of being taught for a state examination in the subject, and can see the importance

of a suitably qualified, linguistically proficient and experienced teacher for languages (see Figure 27 for a selection of responses).

Ironically, in the Scottish system, which has adapted a 1+2 policy (whereby primary schools will implement the teaching of two languages in addition to English), they have adopted a different view of teachers' language proficiency. In their advisory document they state that primary school teachers:

> …do not have to be fluent in the MFL(s) they teach. However, they do need to have enough language and sufficient expertise in using and accessing appropriate resources so that they can include MFL teaching readily in lessons. (Education Scotland, 2017, p.2)

Figure 27: 3rd Year Responses Regarding Teacher Suitability

Edelenbos and Suhre's (1994) study echoed elements of the 3rd year responses, when they asserted that the MFL teachers that were the most qualified and experienced, were also the teachers who spent more time on teaching a foreign language, thereby giving pupils more opportunity to learn.

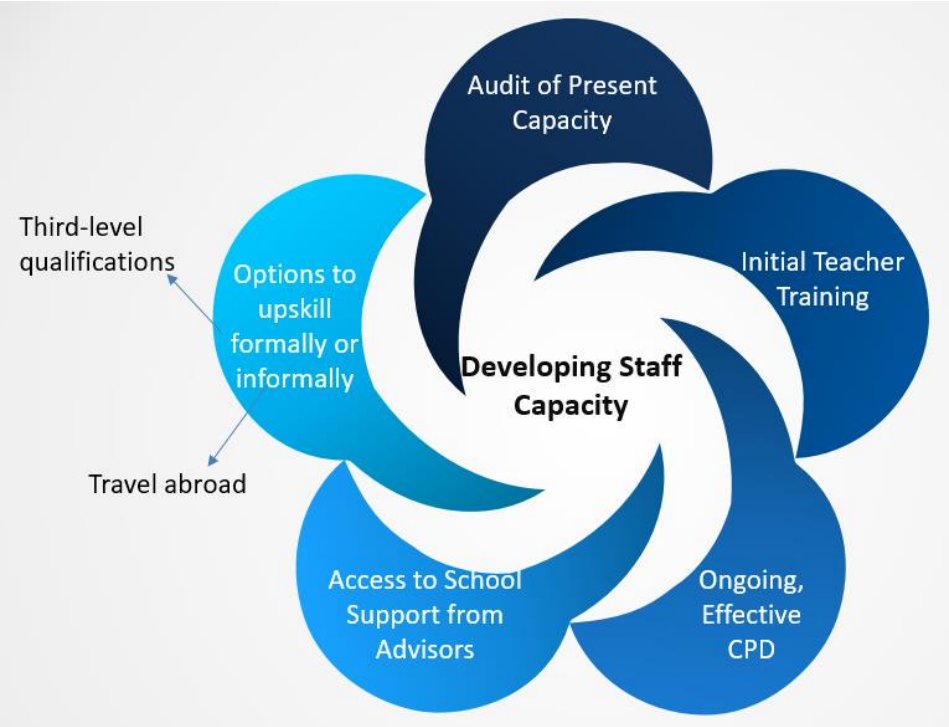
In this research, however, there was significant emphasis by participants on the lack of suitably qualified teachers, with more than 40 references on the issue made between focus groups and surveys, for example*: "SR: Recruiting language teachers could be an issue"* and *"SR: The first challenge would be finding appropriately trained language teachers."* In England, similar findings were made by the Department of Education and Skills who found a significant issue with the lack of suitably qualified teachers (DfES, 2002). Also in England, Long, Danechi and Loft (2020), asserted that the development of a sufficient supply of "properly trained languages teachers" (p.27) to teach the PMFL was a priority. They also acknowledged that in OFSTED inspections, "primary teachers' subject knowledge and their teaching methods were predominantly good" (p.8). At ITT level, Long, Danechi and Loft noted the considerable financial incentives available to trainee language teachers, and free refresher courses provided to more experienced teachers.

In order to develop capacity of teachers to implement the MFL in the primary school, several key elements were asserted by both survey and focus group participants to be vital, as evidenced in Figure 28.

In the past, the MLPSI was found to have provided effective CPD and school support for participating schools. According to Harris and Conway (2002), "The general support system and in-service provided by the team of [Regional Advisors] has been a particular success p202." Furthermore, Harris and O'Leary (2012) convey that the MLPSI had "…a larger innovative role within the education system" (in MLPSI, 2012, p.48). In addition to the school and CPD-based form of training, DES funding provided access to Postgraduate training courses in Institutes of Technology across the country from 2001-2006 and trained 484 primary teachers in French, German, Spanish and Italian (Harris and O'Leary, 2012, in MLPSI, 2012 p.47). European initiatives such as Comenius and more recently Erasmus+, also provide opportunities for teachers to travel abroad, study/train abroad, job shadow or link with another school(s). Moreover, with the Language Assistantship programmes, opportunities have existed for schools

to have access to a Language Assistant (potentially) from the target country, at no extra cost to the school.

Figure 28: Developing Staff Capacity



While these avenues demonstrate that developing capacity through CPD is possible, regarding ITT/ITE, it is not quite straightforward. According to their course information, of the five, third-level institutions that train primary school teachers, either through Bachelor of Education or Postgraduate/ Professional Masters qualifications, four institutions provide no module on MFLs at all, core or optional, while one institution provides an optional specialism in German Studies for the Bachelor of Education programme only. Certainly, if teacher capacity is to be increased, it will be crucial to look at the cohorts of student teachers concurrent to any implementation. Combining all these avenues and identifying effective and efficient ways of developing capacity should considerably aid the introduction and implementation of the MFL. As one principal articulated: *"PB: Well if you combine all of that training, from teacher-training colleges all the way through to travelling abroad, that could work."*

8.6 Surprindings

Before concluding this chapter, I would endeavour to coin the phrase '*surprindings',* which means the surprising findings from the study, i.e., those which had not necessarily featured, or featured to a lesser extent, in the empirical literature. Some of the participants in the study,

particularly in the focus groups, could arguably be described as opponents of the implementation of a primary MFL from the beginning of the discussion. However, it was interesting to witness their opinions changing considerably by the end of the focus group. However, whether this was due to social etiquette or genuine position change is unclear.

The subtheme *Aistear* (the Irish word for journey) is the non-statutory curriculum framework in Ireland for children from birth to six years old (NCCA, 2009). It is a play-based framework involving learning through active learning methodologies, hands-on experiences and communication. It emphasises the reciprocal relationship between teacher and pupil (Gray and Ryan, 2015), offering "…a holistic, practice-oriented approach" (p190). Its potential role within the implementation of the primary MFL was both surprising and thought-provoking in the data. One principal identified it as having potential for the integration of the ML, advocating beginning the ML's introduction at the junior end of the school initially*: "PC: I think that I would ideally introduce it in the junior rooms first…perhaps integrating with Aistear? That would help with the language, the communication and the fun and games…"* while a SR advocated *"SR: [an] Aistear type approach"* when identifying ways of teaching the MFL. This worthwhile *surprinding* does not necessarily have empirical support, other than the early start argument, so would be an interesting mode of introducing the ML, linking directly to the section of this chapter on 'Teaching the ML in the Primary School'.

A one-word response was given in the survey on how to overcome potential barriers to implementing a primary MFL: "Promotion." This was surprising, since it had not emerged at the forefront of the empirical literature, although if one were to review some of the literature on educational management and leadership, it becomes more apparent as an important issue, especially with the emergence of in-school management teams (Wong and Wong, 2005; (Leithwood and Menzies, 1998). Wong (2009) goes so far as to assert that promotional career opportunities hold significance in certain jurisdictions: "Within most of the education systems, given a relatively fixed pay structure, teacher promotion is still a more important factor in motivation" (p.511). Potentially including the MFL implementation in a promoted role within the school may be worth considering.

8.7 Conclusion

The data from this study has produced some very interesting, constructive and timely findings. General positivity and theoretical support for primary MFLs has been demonstrated, although

with some caveats. The coding process has found overarching themes from many research participants, but also identified some noteworthy points from single respondents. It is important to emphasise this validity, as single respondents have equal importance in this research. The study taps into perceptions and ideas rather than something quantitative that requires large numbers in order to be valid.

Whilst identifying key barriers to the introduction of a primary MFL, such as curriculum overload and the overwhelming workload of the primary teacher, this research has also drawn out some effective ways to overcome them, such as cross-curricular integration, reviewing and revising the primary curriculum and potentially reducing/removing certain curricular subjects. It has identified key information concerning the potential teaching/school model, with the use of peripatetic teachers, staff teachers and class teachers all being conveyed as potentially the model to choose.

The findings have shown that while an integrated language curriculum, including a MFL, may be possible, albeit with some contradictions regarding the place of the Irish language, one teaching model will not suit all school circumstances. It is crucial to sustain the status of the MFL if it is to be successfully implemented*: "TA: It is important that the integrity of the subject be maintained in the timetable. That is important, whether a class teacher, staff teacher or an outside teacher comes in to teach the language."* Participants asserted that school autonomy is vital to maintain, whether in selecting the language to be taught, or implementing their own teaching model, within the parameters of what is feasible: *"SR: Consultation with teachers about how an additional language might be introduced is important. it might be important to consider the specific needs of the school."* Integrating this with appropriate, active learning methodologies and an effective transition policy, was also of priority for many participants.

Findings have also identified issues around self-efficacy and the need for extensive supports and training for teachers: from the initial training phases, through to the current cohort of teachers, in order to effectively develop staff capacity. Developing staff capacity at all levels is important to teachers, with one participant suggesting an audit of the capacity already within the system. Providing funded opportunities for postgraduate study for teachers and an intensive training, a scaffolding and support process, development of qualified, high-quality, language teachers, were all a priority for participants.

Taking the data, along with the various literature that has been reviewed, to formulate the findings into specific and practicable recommendations will be important and will be featured in the next, and final chapter.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language that goes to his heart."

Nelson Mandela

9.1 Introduction and the Study's Original Contribution to Knowledge

This chapter presents the conclusions from this piece of research and highlights recommendations for any potential future policy development. Implications that may arise from the findings are analysed and issues and challenges will be presented. As Driscoll (1999) asserts, "We must accept of course that the implementation of a PMFL will not be free of difficulty" (p.24) It is important to note that all the findings from this study must be interpreted somewhat carefully in the context of the limitations of the research itself. It must also be acknowledged, that while elements of this study affirm findings of previous empirical research, it also demonstrates an original contribution to knowledge on several grounds. Firstly, the findings of this study certainly affirm Madsen's (1983) claims to give "new insights into little-understood" (p.25) primary MFLs in Ireland. Additionally, to my knowledge, there has been no study on the topic of primary MFLs from this jurisdiction with the combination of stakeholders' perceptions included. The study contributes to the gap in the literature through the perceptions garnered from the voices of primary teachers, principals, 6th class pupils and 3rd year pupils. These perceptions provided unique and original data from which notable and informative findings were generated in relation to the introduction of PMFLs.

To make any language programme successful, it must be sustainable (Maynard, 2012). Maynard suggests that for it to be sustainable, four areas need to be developed: Transition, Delivery Models, Teachers' Attitudes and Confidence, and Training (p104). These key areas will be dealt with explicitly by the close of this chapter through the presentation of conclusions and recommendations in relation to the research questions posed from the outset. Presenting conclusions in such a way demonstrates to the reader that these questions were sufficiently answered, presenting each strand of the tapestry which will ultimately inform the primary research question. The next section of this chapter will present these research questions in a spiral order, whereby the discussion of each question should build upon its predecessor. This hierarchy is not based on any level of importance *per se*, it is however based on the

researcher's own examination of both the literature and the findings and the steps that would need to be taken to successfully and effectively introduce and implement a MFL at primary level in the Republic of Ireland. After the examination of the research questions, recommendations will be made as to potential future research in this area, followed by the chapter conclusion.

9.2 Conclusions and Recommendations

As previously mentioned, in this section, each of the eight secondary research questions will form the structure for discussion, providing conclusions and recommendations based on the findings from the literature review and the study itself, culminating in a clear response to the primary research question at the end of the section.

9.2.1 What are the barriers to implementing a primary modern language in the Republic of Ireland?

This is one of the only research questions where there was almost a consensus as to the main barrier which would need to be overcome before introducing a MFL into primary school. In both phases of the research, most opinions conveyed, suggested that an overloaded curriculum/lack of time/'initiativitis' were prevalent concerns. Such feeling was asserted as potentially affecting teachers' wellbeing; affirming the assertions of the NCCA in their reports from 2005 and 2008 and echo Hargreaves' (2008) assertion that the "proliferation of multiple initiatives" (p.24) equates to "initiativitis" (p.24), which are significant barriers to implementing the MFL.

Additionally, several concerns came to light in the research, many of which affirmed the decisions made on the secondary research questions from the study. The issues of teacher capacity within the system, along with the teaching model and teacher language proficiency provoked significant trepidation and some disagreement among participants, all of which, will be discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter. Finally, teaching-related concerns such as resourcing, effective methodologies, the effects on the Irish language and the commitment/buy-in from teachers all came up as issues, and will also be discussed in later sections of this chapter.

Strikingly, many of these barriers to implementing the language linked directly to the subsequent secondary research questions posed from the outset. It is important for the reader to keep in mind that this occurred without the impact of confirmation bias of any kind. Both the

surveys and focus groups did not involve the researcher as a central 'influencer', merely as a moderator/unobtrusive observer and these findings are directly quotable from the transcripts and the coding process.

9.2.2 How can curriculum overload at primary level be overcome?

The dominant, most mentioned barrier to the implementation, that of curriculum overload, is certainly not something to be dealt with half-heartedly. An effective and practicable combination of measures and advice for teachers would need to be put in place for any introduction of a MFL into the primary curriculum. In this study, participants suggested several ideas for overcoming curriculum overload and lack of time. For some, it was as straight-forward as eliminating or reducing one of the subjects already in the curriculum, for example, Religion or the Irish language, while for others, cross-curricular integration was the potential solution. Additionally, in one of the teacher's focus groups, the point was made that having a peripatetic teacher would help alleviate issues with time and 'fitting in' the MFL in the week, by establishing set times in the timetable.

Ultimately, a combination of the above, could overcome curriculum overload. Certainly, a reduction of time allocations to (some) subjects, a cut in the number of new initiatives introduced into primary school, training on effective cross-curricular integration for the language, and use of a specifically timetabled, peripatetic teacher, could all contribute to overcoming this barrier. A barrier, which if not effectively dealt with will thwart any possible introduction, possibly fuelling further disillusionment among teachers and making the MFL impossible to sustain.

9.2.3 How can teaching capacity be best developed?

In terms of Initial Teacher Training (ITT), it would be crucial to embed MFLs into all teacher-training courses, B.Ed. and Professional Masters, across all providers in this country. Raising the status of MFLs as a curricular subject at this point in a teacher's development would be important for the system and providing elective options for teachers to investigate the subject further would also be worthwhile. Additionally, providing opportunities for trainee teachers to teach in the target country (i.e., the country where the chosen MFL is spoken) would be highly motivating, insightful and ultimately fruitful for the system, yielding informed, linguistically competent, proficient and motivated teachers for the subject.

It is important to keep in mind, that nurturing the opinion in ITT/CPD that a simple 'taster' of the language could be part of the curriculum, would not be sufficient. It would ultimately undermine the credibility of the subject and its future standing in the primary curriculum. It is important to develop the pupils' language proficiency in an effective and sustained manner, following an appropriate curriculum. Being proactive, developing linguistic proficiency, taking the subject seriously from the beginning, and underpinning it with proven and successful teaching approaches would yield positive results later.

The modular CPD model established and implemented by the MLPSI, combined with their establishment of Teacher Professional Communities, school-support visits, development of the European Language Portfolio and establishing links with the embassies, Cultural Institutes and training providers abroad, all combined to present schools with extensive opportunities to develop their language teaching capacity. The CPD model, specifically "welcomed and commended by participating schools and partner agencies in education" (MLPSI, 2012, p.29). This was also echoed by Harris and Conway (2002), "The general support system and in-service provided by the team of [Regional Advisors] has been a particular success (p.202)." Given the high-quality provision and the need for developing teaching capacity, attendance at specific CPD events should be compulsory for teachers to develop capacity from within. Follow-up advisory visits built on the learning and established it in the true school and classroom context.

One other potential avenue for CPD is what Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991), and subsequently (Wenger (1998), coined 'communities of practice.' As outlined in Chapter 8, the development of communities of practice can potentially provide an ongoing support network for teachers and schools, whether at school-level, local-level or regional-level. Combining formal, face to face CPD with school visits and developing communities of practice, could prove to be both practicable and effective for teachers, giving the appropriate levels of scaffolding and support for introducing and implementing a primary MFL.

9.2.4 How can primary teachers' language proficiency/linguistic competence be developed?

It is important that if a MFL were to be introduced, the NCCA should specify a minimum level of language proficiency for teachers in order to provide clarity on what linguistic proficiency is required of primary language teachers. As found in this study, teachers were unsure of what was the requisite language level required, and this could prove problematic in the longer term. Specifying the necessary linguistic proficiency from the beginning would remove any ambiguity.

This would link to a more formal, integrated plan for developing teachers' language proficiency from the beginning of Initial Teacher Training (ITT), throughout teachers' careers. Participants were unsure what determined a linguistically proficient teacher for primary MFLs, and this lack of consensus should be rectified with guidance from the NCCA.

Regarding teachers' language CPD and upskilling to develop their linguistic skills, making use of the many opportunities for developing language proficiency and language-teaching methods, both at a local level through TPCs, as well as travel abroad for training through programmes such as Erasmus+ would be recommended. This would be a cost-effective option for teachers, and if, as has existed in the past, teachers could use their Extra Personal Vacation days (which exist on completion of specific teaching summer courses), there could be added motivation to attend the training. Linking the training provider, e.g., the MLPSI, with the education centre network across Ireland would also help develop a blueprint for developing language proficiency and enable access for teachers to language courses/language teaching courses, face-to-face and online.

9.2.5 What teaching model would best suit to teach a modern foreign language?

There was some disagreement among participants as to the model for introducing and implementing the MFL. While many favoured the more specialist, peripatetic model, others felt that using a staff member to teach the language would be of more benefit to the school. The generalist teacher having, according to Driscoll (1999), a broader knowledge of the curriculum and of the pupils themselves, while the specialist, peripatetic teacher may have stronger language proficiency and knowledge of the culture. Could one not have both sets of advantages? Is a staff, specialist teacher not the compromise? However, not every school context is the same and some participants argued that their school may not have the staff capacity to teach the language, which ultimately negates this compromise point. However, one principal asserted the counterargument, that principals need to keep this in mind when taking on new staff.

The first step would ideally be to conduct an audit of the teaching capacity that is already in place. This would inform the next phase of implementation. What was clear from the MLPSI, was that a mix of the various models was necessary to cater for the various schools' contexts, but that developing capacity from within the system is the most cost-effective model. In rural Ireland, for example, where there is a considerable number of small schools with less than

three or four classroom teachers, there may not be the required capacity for teaching the MFL, so, as recommended by several participants, a cluster model would be most practicable for these schools.

A formalised system for the placement of Language Assistants across the country at primary level would be advantageous and could address a potential short-term staff capacity issue. Potentially, a roadmap for using peripatetic teachers across the system initially, in order to develop the teacher capacity from within, is an option, while using a peripatetic teacher across clusters in rural Ireland, like the SEN model, would be worthwhile. Throughout, the roadmap is concurrently planning for developing teacher capacity through ITT and CPD.

Examining both the empirical literature (MLPSI, 2012, Arad Consulting, 2010, Hunt et al., 2005) and the findings from this research, it was apparent that, while there are distinct advantages (and, indeed disadvantages) attributable to both the peripatetic specialist model of teaching and the classroom, generalist model, finding common ground would be advisable. Each school context will be different but identifying the general needs of schools in terms of staffing, while offering a scaffolded approach, if needed, will be crucial. In some schools, a clustered model may be the long-term solution, while in other, potentially larger schools, a peripatetic teacher can work with classroom teachers in its introduction, for example, with a gradual release to a teacher on staff. This point essentially links to Vygotsky's concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) with the idea that anyone, in this case, a teacher, would learn best when collaborating with a skilled peer in order to learn and acquire new skills (Vygotsky, 1978). This could be done in conjunction with the local secondary school(s), or in a clustered arrangement, or by each school employing a peripatetic teacher for a set number of years. There are certainly solutions to this issue, and the findings reflect the empirical evidence. No model stands out head and shoulders above the rest, but a mix of models would reflect the mix of schools within the system.

9.2.6 Which language(s) do the participants identify as being the most suitable to teach in primary schools in the Republic of Ireland?

In the findings, there was no clear consensus on which language should be taught. It became apparent that many of the languages suggested by participants were ones, for the most part, that they, themselves had experience of, whether by formal or informal learning. French, Spanish and German were the most popular in the findings, however Italian, Mandarin and

Portuguese were also mentioned. For some, the selection of the language should be determined by its utilitarian value.

In contrast, many of the participants, particularly in the focus groups had asserted that the language(s) taught in the local secondary school would determine what MFL the primary school should introduce. However, not everyone concurred, with one participant strongly advocating the opposite approach, positing that learning a different language in primary school should be advantageous to pupils, which would link constructively with the Primary Languages Curriculum.

Whichever language(s) are selected to be introduced, it will be important to assess the actual capacity among teachers for these languages, as well as the cost of supporting each language from the DES. It is also worth keeping in mind that the language selection itself would not be the dominant focus, rather, the language-learning skills developed through whichever language is selected at local level. For this to happen effectively, would require an alignment of the MFL with the new Primary Language Curriculum.

In order to develop a truly integrated language curriculum, with English, Irish and a MFL, it is vital to mention and include reference to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) as it provides the requisite commonality of language learning, which will allow the language curriculum to easily integrate with the present, new Primary Language Curriculum (2019). The CEFR was established, to define a commonality of language learning objectives, along with content and methods across education systems describing "…in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do, in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively" (Council of Europe, 2001, p1). It has since been updated (Council of Europe, 2018) and now categorises language activities into four specific types: "reception (listening and reading), production (spoken and written), interaction (spoken and written), and mediation (translating and interpreting)" (Ćatibušić and Little, 2014, p14). In using the reception, production, interaction categories, along with several competences, the CEFR outlines six common reference levels (A1 (Breakthrough), A2 (Waystage), B1 (Threshold), B2 (Vantage), C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency), C2 (Mastery)) (Council of Europe, 2001, p23), using "can do" descriptors to define the learner's language proficiency at each level.

Aligning with the CEFR, the MLPSI-produced 'My European Languages Portfolio' (MLPSI, 2005) which could be highly beneficial here as through its use of the CEFR, it "…provides a potential model for the development of a structure to support an integrated language curriculum" (Ó Duibhir and Cummins, 2012, p.82). Produced by the MLPSI and accredited by the Council of Europe in 2005, it functions as a self-assessment tool for pupils and a planning tool for teachers, ultimately providing a specific level of proficiency that can be planned for and assessed (formally or informally) by the language teacher. Further aligning the MFL with the new Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2019) could prove to be an effective and efficient integration of the subject with the other two languages already in the Primary Curriculum. Keogh-Bryan made a similar recommendation in her 2019 study:

> Using the format of the Primary Language Curriculum/*Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* for the MFL would facilitate the easier integration and transfer of language knowledge and skills across all languages. (p.144).

What is important to consider is that while pupils in the later years of primary school would be learning at Stage 4 of the Primary Language Curriculum, this would not align with their potential MFL learning, which would only be introduced at that point. It is worth considering, as Keogh-Bryan also advocates, that while aligning the draft MFL curriculum (1998), with the present Primary Language Curriculum would be worthwhile, an alignment with the secondary level framework for languages, would see more definite progression and continuity in the MFL, thus also enabling effective transition to take place.

9.2.7 What teaching approaches would be most appropriate to teach a modern foreign language?

This was a topic that espoused great positivity in the focus group discussions, and where teachers and principals demonstrated the passion for their profession. Suggesting the most effective teaching approaches all stemmed from one common word among several participants: "Enjoyment." Additionally, the methods and approaches decided upon by focus group participants emphasised the importance of moving away from the book-determined programme, towards active learning and a mix of resources and methods. This point was further expanded by adding in the importance of communication and oral language development. These methodologies are at the core of the draft NCCA-produced documents from 1999 and the MLPSI's guidance.

The use of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) should also be considered (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010), for both the linguistic and content development of the lessons, but also how it could also help to alleviate curriculum overload, as advocated by the MLPSI for many years (Dillon, 2009).

The place of both language awareness and cultural awareness in the primary MFL classroom was grounded in the reality of them both being strands within the Draft Curriculum (NCCA, 1999). Over time, the position of the more contemporary terms of both metalinguistic awareness and intercultural awareness are still important elements to include (Driscoll and Simpson, 2015; Driscoll, 2004). In this study, significant reference was made to the importance of intercultural awareness both as an aspect of the language curriculum, but also to integrate the language with other subjects. This area is certainly one to include in any potential MFL curriculum/programme.

Assessment and differentiation have important roles to play in the education system and they will also be vital in terms of implementing a MFL, as with the other curricular subjects. Interestingly, there were very few mentions of both concepts in this research.

Courtney and Graham (2019) investigated a possible digital assessment method for MFLs, as, they assert, "a central challenge within classroom-based early language learning, where there is a need to employ assessment methods, which, as well as being valid and reliable for a range of learners, protect rather than diminish motivation" (p.1). Courtney and Graham found that the digital- based assessment from their study was highly motivating for pupils. Assessment, for the authors, might cause significant anxiety for early language learners and using a game-based approach, as they did in their study, could solve the issue of catering for the needs of all learners in the language class. Differentiation, according to the NCCA, "relates at its simplest to any strategies that help a teacher to make a move away from 'teaching to the middle' of a class group" (NCCA, 2006, p.14). This approach will be vital in a language class, in order to develop an inclusive environment, for all learners, whether this classroom is single-stream, or multi-grade. Effective guidance on implementing both assessment and differentiation in the MFL class is also highly recommended in any implementation of a MFL.

9.2.8 How can effective transition from primary to secondary be implemented with modern foreign languages?

From both the findings of this study and the empirical research reviewed, it became increasingly evident that primary/secondary transition has been a key concern in primary MFL provision (Courtney, 2017). As one respondent posited, "*SR: A foundation at primary level only if its followed through to second level would be beneficial*." Following examination of both the empirical evidence and the research findings, it was clear that planning for effective transition is crucial. Ensuring that effective continuity and progression is in place for primary language learners will help to alleviate the demotivation that can come early at secondary level, as found in studies by Powell et al. (2000) and McElwee (2009) who proposed that teachers' failure to capitalise on previous language learning experiences can be its cause.

It is important to remind the reader that this continuity is not limited just to learners of the same language moving onto secondary school and learning the same language. Learning any language at primary level and learning a different language at secondary level should not mean that their language-learning experiences be ignored and in fact their transferrable language skills will be important to incorporate into the language lessons. This could be incorporated into the secondary language teachers' CPD, which would prepare pupils appropriately, based on the progress they had previously made in primary school.

Ultimately, local liaising between schools, incorporating similar teaching methodologies in transition at least, differentiation and acknowledgement of prior learning will all be crucial.

9.2.9 Primary Research Question: What are the perceived ideal conditions necessary for successful implementation of a PMFL curriculum in the Republic of Ireland?

This, as evidenced throughout this piece of research, was something of a 'loaded' question. It derived many different connotations from various stakeholders. For this researcher, it means simply what it states, without nuance or interpretation. I feel that through this study, my own understanding of what 'perceived ideal conditions' means however, changed, and took a more macro stance, rather than the initial micro-view of the issue of primary MFL teaching and learning. Looking at the bigger picture, taking all the data and subsequent findings and avoiding the 'camel being a horse designed by committee' trope, was not conclusively possible. However, from analysing the data, it is clear that formal changes within the educational infrastructure of ITT and CPD would be needed, concurrent to an audit of capacity already

within the system, to identify and plan for numbers of qualified teachers within the system. Furthermore, changes to the primary curriculum, the development of a MFL programme linked to the Primary Language Curriculum, an effective transition plan, the importance of a flexible initial recruitment system for schools and appropriate funding for resources, have all been highlighted as fundamental conditions for any changes, pilot or permanent, to be implemented.

9.3 Limitations of the Study

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. In relation to using an online survey, it could be argued that a paper-based survey might be better for some participants, in terms of practicability, but the online process was easier and quicker for all to use. A key limitation of the study relates to the findings of the study, which are based on data from relatively small samples of 108 teachers and principals and eleven 6th class pupils and eleven 3rd year students. Whether the findings could be generalizable to a broader sample is not guaranteed. Additionally, it is important to point out that all the participants were recruited from an initial convenience sample, although this was done after considerable research into focus groups. Due to this sampling method, the participants were not chosen through a rigorous, probability-based sampling method, and as a result, the participants did not statistically represent any specific population or demographic. However, this limitation is not as crucial if the purpose of the study was to "explore rather than to describe or explain in any definitive sense" (Babbie, 2007, p. 309). Moreover, there is a lack of statistical significance and certainty with qualitative research in general, which could correlate with qualitative surveys. What all of this means for the research, is that the findings need to be treated with a certain amount of caution and it is important to note that claims about external validity are not necessarily being made.

It is also worthwhile to keep in mind that, in order to counterbalance the participant number limitations, the samples are from a wide range of school circumstances, particularly the teachers and principals, who come from rural, urban, and disadvantaged schools from across the country. Therefore, the sample is broadly representative. It is also worth noting that neither the survey nor focus groups had any participants that I would have had regular/day-to-day contact with. It is of paramount importance to recognise the place of positionality in this study. Positionality, as Bourke (2014) asserts is the place where objectivism and subjectivism congregate together. Bourke quotes Freire's suggestion that the two exist in a "dialectic

relationship" (Freire, 2000, p. 50, in Bourke, 2014) and reminds us that searching for a pure objectivism in the research "is a naïve quest, and we can never truly divorce ourselves of subjectivity. We can strive to remain objective but must be ever mindful of our subjectivities" (p.3).

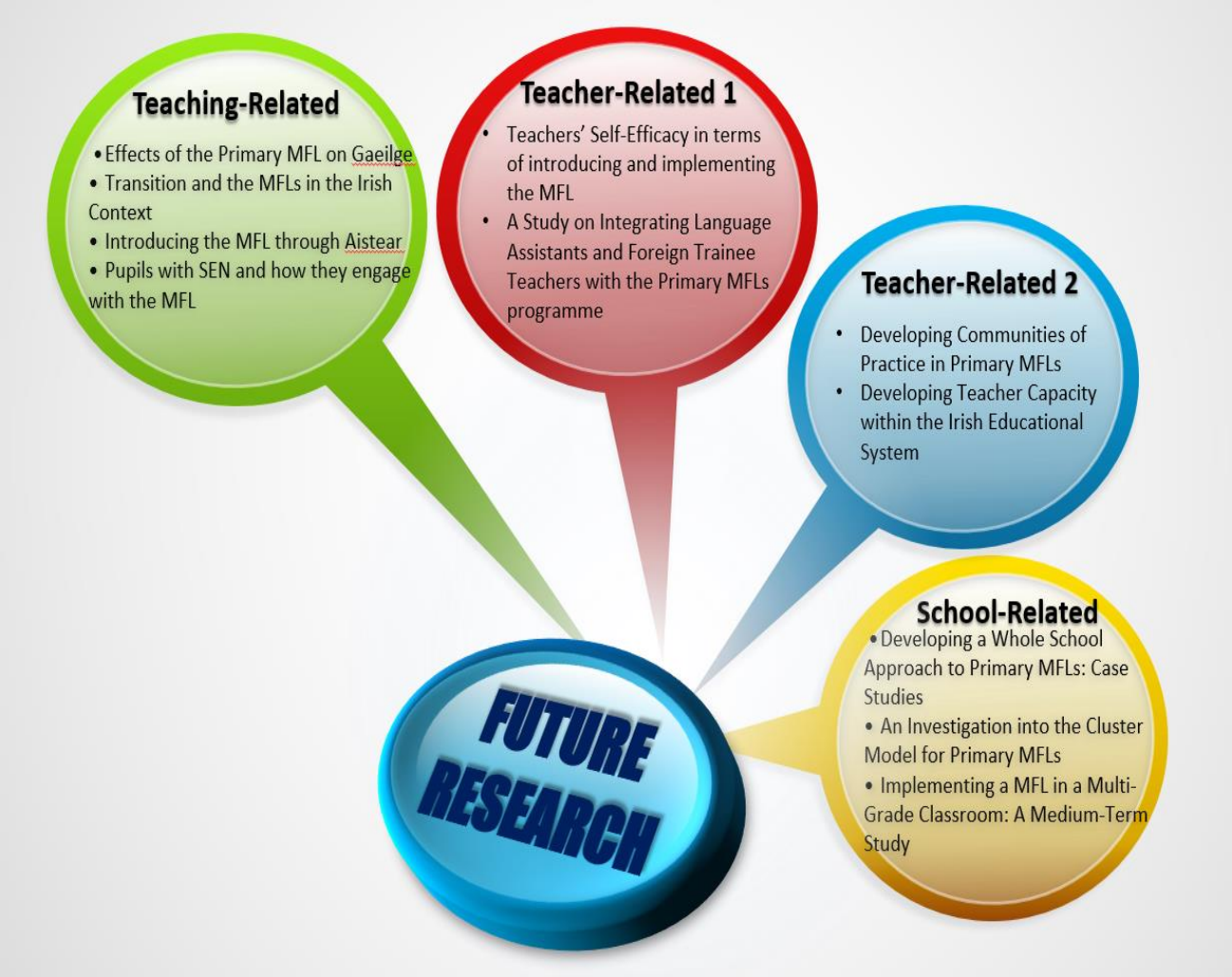
Smithson (2000) makes the key point that a further limitation can exist, in focus groups particularly, where one voice becomes dominant, which results in "the tendency for certain types of socially acceptable opinion to emerge" (p.12). During the focus groups in this study however, it is important to note that opinions were valued from all the participants and the collegiality of all the groups meant that dominant voices were not as prevalent as they could have been.

Despite my own positionality within the research as former Regional Advisor with the MLPSI, all steps were taken to negate any potential bias, through facilitation of the focus groups (where most of the data was generated) as an unobtrusive observer of a scenario-based task. Reflecting on the role of the participant-researcher, it could be entirely plausible however, that my positionality could have been an advantage and a strength to the study. My professional experiences could help me understand the data in a way that an 'outsider' researcher would not. It is also worth highlighting that reflexivity is key to avoiding bias, and while a researcher can never be 100% objective, or value-free, rigor and validity are always sought. Finally, Babbie (2007) asserts that "the best study design uses more than one research method" (p.110). The triangulation of using both a qualitative survey and focus groups, and the data that has been generated have essentially given the researcher more confidence in the validity and rigour of the study.

9.4 Recommendations for Further Research

There has been such a paucity of research in this area for so many years, especially in the Republic of Ireland, that it was quite difficult to narrow down the focus in order to give specific proposals for any potential, future research. As a result, many of the recommendations here relate to what this researcher feels would need to be studied should a MFL be introduced at primary level, rather than in the current vacuum that this thesis finds itself. After taking the reviewed empirical literature, in combination with the findings of this study, it is the opinion of this researcher that the following areas should be examined in the future (see Figure 29):

Figure 29: Recommendations for Future Research



9.5 Conclusion

In a presentation to the European Commission thematic panel of languages and literacy (2017), Dr. Thomas Bak contended that "In order to benefit from language learning you don't need to be a baby, a genius or perfect," in other words, anyone can learn and benefit from a language. Given the overwhelmingly affirmative responses to the initial question in the survey, it is clear the research sample are somewhat in agreement, in theory, if not necessarily in reality.

Through the process, I developed my skills as a research instrument capable of, as Xu and Storr (2012) assert, "collecting rich data and developing a nuanced and complete interpretation congruent with the philosophical underpinnings" of the research topic (p.15).

I remained alert to my own positionality throughout the research process, especially when assuming the roles of researcher and interviewer. My own background knowledge, expertise

and experience in the area of PMFLs could have become a significant limitation, potentially distorting the ultimate findings in order to suit my own ontological and epistemological positions. However, in my opinion, my positionality, and my awareness of it, was a strength throughout the study, making me cognisant at all times of any potential biases, including confirmation bias. My own professional background made me reflect on the complexity of the research topic, which was vital, especially in the analysis part of the process. Reflecting on my own positionality also forced me to be extra vigilant regarding the potential evasion of any negativity to the topic and it also gave me the knowledge and expertise to see nuance in the data and make tangible links to the literature, reflecting the complexity of the topic.

Language learning in the Republic of Ireland is something of an 'outlier' in terms of implementation, with two national languages, both of which are statutorily taught through the formal education system, but at no point in the education system is a MFL a mandatory subject. Whether or not the obligatory status of the subject (or lack thereof) gives it prestige is a slightly moot point. It deflects from the real issues surrounding its implementation and ultimately it is the 'buy-in' from stakeholders, both educator and learner, that will determine its success. This is done by creating the best learning environment possible: inclusive, enjoyable, motivating, scaffolded and effective, for both teachers and pupils. If a MFL is to be introduced successfully into the primary system, it should not be forced or rushed. It should be planned effectively, and sufficient preparations made, both at a national and local level. We must also understand, as Patricia Driscoll (1999) asserts, that "the implementation of a primary MFL will not be free of difficulty" (p.24). There remain barriers to overcome and potentially long-term debates to be had. This research may have provided a variety of findings that will inform the future of primary modern foreign languages in Ireland, but at the core, why would a pupil learn a language? One of the 6th class respondents suggested the most succinct of reasons for its introduction, and is the most apt way of concluding this thesis:

"So you can speak more than two speaks."

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PERMISSION LETTER SAMPLE

Date: 25th March 2019

Mr._____

School Principal

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear _____,

I am writing to request permission to conduct part of a research study at your school. I am currently enrolled in the PhD Professional programme at the University of Lincoln in the United Kingdom and am in the process of conducting research for my thesis. The study is aimed at garnering perceptions of primary teachers, principals, 3rd Year students, and in your case, 6th class pupils, on the topic of learning a modern foreign language at primary school.

I hope that you will allow me to recruit between ten and twelve 6th class pupils from the school to anonymously complete a short, online survey. According to my university supervisor, you, as Principal of the school, may act *in loco parentis* in giving permission for students to complete the survey, signing one single consent form on behalf of all participating students.

If approval is granted, pupil participants will complete the survey in a classroom or other quiet setting on the school site, at a convenient time. The survey process should take no longer than 5-10 minutes. The survey results will be pooled for the thesis project and individual results of this study will remain confidential and anonymous. In final thesis format, or any other published text, only pooled results will be documented. Pupils may withdraw from the study up to Saturday, 20th April 2019, by which time the findings will be pooled and analysed to such an extent as to make identification of any data impossible to extract.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I would be most happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have, and you may contact me at my email address XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX and my mobile number is XXXXXXXXXXXXX

If you agree, kindly sign below and return. Alternatively, there is a version of the permission form for each parent/guardian. I attach in this document a parental consent form to be circulated to, and signed by, the parent(s) of each participant, should you feel that this would be more appropriate.

Many thanks for this opportunity, it is very much appreciated. Many thanks.

Yours faithfully,

_____

Mr. Brendan Duignan

cc: Dr. Carol Callinan (Supervisor, School of Education, University of Lincoln)

I _____(name), hereby give permission for the following students to take part in the research study (**Primary Modern foreign languages in Ireland: A probable impossibility or an improbable possibility?**) through completion of an anonymous online survey:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

I have been given the information about the study and have been informed that students may withdraw from the research at any time up to Saturday, 13th April 2019, by which time the findings will be pooled and analysed to such an extent as to make identification of any data impossible to extract.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

School Principal

I _____(name), hereby give permission for my child _____ (child's name) to take part in the research study (**Primary Modern foreign languages in Ireland: A probable impossibility or an improbable possibility?)** through completion of an anonymous online survey.

I have been given the information about the study and have been informed that students may withdraw from the research at any time up to Saturday, 13th April 2019, by which time the findings will be pooled and analysed to such an extent as to make identification of any data impossible to extract.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian

Perceptions on Primary Modern Languages

Purpose of this survey: To identify perceptions regarding the teaching and learning of modern languages in primary schools in Ireland. This is part of a PhD Thesis with the University of Lincoln and all information gathered will be confidential. No participant will be named in the research. If you wish to contact me, my details are:
Brendan Duignan and my email address is duignanbrendan@eircom.net. If you wish to withdraw from the research this can be done up to 31st March 2019.
Many thanks for taking part in this research.

* Required

Email address *

Your email

Name *

Your answer

In which county in Ireland are you based? *

Your answer

Are you: *

- ◯ Primary Teaching Principal
- ◯ Primary Administrative Principal
- ◯ Primary Teacher

When do you believe a modern language should be introduced at primary level? *

- [ ] Never
- [ ] Junior/Senior Infants
- [ ] 1st/2nd Class
- [ ] 3rd/4th Class
- [ ] 5th/6th Class

Is your school (tick as appropriate) *

- [ ] Rural
- [ ] Urban

Is your school part of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Do you believe that there are benefits to learning a modern language at primary level? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Please explain why you do/do not believe there are benefits to learning a modern language at primary level *

Your answer

What do you consider to be the challenges that would need to be addressed in order to implement a primary modern language? *

Your answer

How do you think these challenges could be overcome? *

Your answer

Do you have anything further that you wish to add? *

Your answer

Focus groups will form an important part of this research, could you please tick if you would be interested in taking part in a brief, once-off, locally-based focus group? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

If you are interested in participating in a focus group please provide a contact number here:

Your answer

The data collected will provide useful information regarding teacher and principal perceptions of primary modern languages. If you would like a summary copy of this study please tick:

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Submit

Page 1 of 1

Modern Languages in Primary Schools

This survey wants to get the thoughts and opinions of 6th class pupils about learning a modern language in primary school.

This is part of a PhD Thesis with the University of Lincoln and all information gathered will be confidential. No participant will be named in the research.
If you wish to withdraw from the research this can be done up to 20th April 2019.
Many thanks for taking part in this research.

* Required

Have you ever learned a language at school (other than English or Irish)? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

If you answered 'Yes', what language did you learn?

Your answer

Do you think that knowing a modern language (for example, French or Spanish) is useful? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Why do you think this? *

Your answer

Do you think that a modern language should be taught in primary school? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Why?/Why not? *

Your answer

When do you think a modern language should be introduced? *

- ☐ Junior Infants/Senior Infants
- ☐ 1st Class/2nd Class
- ☐ 3rd Class/4th Class
- ☐ 5th Class/6th Class
- ☐ Secondary School
- ☐ Never

What language(s) would you like to learn at primary school? *

Your answer

Is there anything else that you would like to say? *

Your answer

Submit

Page 1 of 1

APPENDIX 4: COPY OF SURVEY (SECONDARY: 3RD YEAR STUDENTS)

Modern Languages in Primary School

Purpose of Survey: The survey is aimed at getting opinions of 3rd Year students, on the topic of learning a modern language at primary school.

This is part of a PhD Thesis with the University of Lincoln and all information gathered will be confidential.

This is an anonymous survey.

If you wish to withdraw from the research this can be done up to 20th April 2019.
Many thanks for taking part in this research.

* Required

Did you study a language in primary school (other than English and Gaeilge)? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Do you study a modern language (French/German/Spanish etc) in secondary school? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

If you study a modern language in secondary school, what language is it? *

- ◯ French
- ◯ German
- ◯ Spanish
- ◯ Italian
- ◯ Other

Do you think that learning a modern language in primary school would be of benefit to pupils? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

What is your opinion on learning a modern language? *

Your answer

How important is learning a modern language for your generation?

Your answer

Do you think that a modern language should be introduced in primary school? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Why?/Why not? *

Your answer

When do you think a modern language should be introduced? *

- [ ] Junior Infants/Senior Infants
- [ ] 1st Class/2nd Class
- [ ] 3rd Class/4th Class
- [ ] 5th Class/6th Class
- [ ] Secondary School
- [ ] Never

What changes, do you think, would need to be made for primary schools to introduce a modern language? *

Your answer

What language do you think should be learned at primary school? *

Your answer

Do you have anything you would like to add? *

Your answer

Submit

Page 1 of 1

APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR FOCUS GROUPS

Researcher: Brendan Duignan

Focus Group Number: _____ PR/TE Venue:_____

Participants: **Consent Form:**

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Questions	Answered	Notes
KEEP IN MIND: **What are the ideal conditions necessary for successful implementation of a primary modern foreign languages curriculum in the Republic of Ireland?** What are the barriers to implementing a primary modern foreign language? How to overcome curriculum overload? How can teaching capacity best be developed? How to develop teachers' linguistic competence? Teacher profiles: peripatetic or staff-teacher? How best to implement effective transition from primary to secondary? Which teaching approaches would be most suitable? Which language to teach? Effect on Irish? Inclusion?		

TEACHERS' FOCUS GROUP TASK

The Principal in your school has decided that a modern foreign language should be taught to the senior class pupils (5th and 6th Classes) and has asked you to lead the implementation of the subject. This role would initially include the planning and teaching of the language. How will you implement the modern foreign language in your school to ensure it is as effective and beneficial to all involved?

PRINCIPALS' FOCUS GROUP TASK

You have received a circular from the Department of Education and Skills stating that a modern foreign language will be taught in all primary schools, initially (but not limited to) just 5th and 6th classes, beginning in September 2020. What are the considerations that you, as Principal, will need to identify in order to implement this change and ensure that it is effective and beneficial to all involved?

EA2

Ethical Approval Form: Human Research Projects

Please word-process this form, handwritten applications will not be accepted

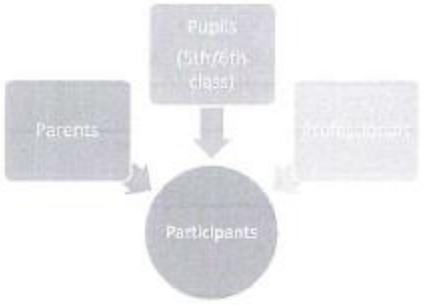
UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN

This form must be completed for each piece of research activity whether conducted by academic staff, research staff, graduate students or undergraduates. The completed form must be approved by the designated authority within the College.

Please complete all sections. If a section is not applicable, write N/A.

1 Name of Applicant	Brendan Duignan	
	School: Education	College: Social Sciences
2 Position in the University	Doctoral Student	
3 Role in relation to this research	Primary investigator	
4 Brief statement of main Research Question	What are the ideal conditions necessary for successful implementation of a primary modern languages curriculum in the Republic of Ireland?	
5 Brief Description of Project	Much research has been completed in the area of primary modern languages and many of these studies have outlined significant merits in their introduction (Krashen et al., 1982; Singleton, 1987; Sharpe and Driscoll, 2002; Stewart, 2005). However, despite these findings, Ireland remains the only country in Europe where a modern language is neither compulsory nor optional at primary level (Eurydice, 2012). This does not mean that modern languages have never had a place in the primary curriculum in Ireland, and indeed from 1999-2012, firstly a Pilot Project for Modern Languages and subsequently a Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative existed in approximately 13% of primary schools in Ireland. Several reports about this initiative delineated the significantly positive impact that it was having on pupils' intrinsic motivation to language learning, as well as developing their intercultural and linguistic awareness (Harris and Conway, 2002; NCCA, 2005; Royal Irish Academy, 2011; MLPSI, 2012). However, despite the relatively affirmative findings, the Department of Education and Skills made the decision in 2011 to abolish the MLPSI due to budgetary constraints. The initiative concluded with 546 schools participating, with more than 23,000 pupils being taught per year (MLPSI, 2012). At present, and indeed, historically, there has been a significant paucity of research into modern languages in Ireland. There have always been anecdotal question marks as to its potential implementation, but numerous reports which feature the issue of curriculum overload may have been potentially been an issue (NCCA, 1993; NCCA, 2005; NCCA, 2008; NCCA, 2010, INTO, 2015) It could also be argued that any early modern language learning in Ireland takes place in a sociolinguistic context which differs greatly from its European counterparts (Harris, 2007). The second part of the evaluation of the work of the MLPSI recognised these constraints and others: curriculum overload, questions over transition, inadequate linguistic competence of teachers, and the potential negative impact on the Irish language (Harris and O'Leary, 2007). While the evaluation did feature a quantitative survey of schools involved in the initiative, I have always felt that since the abolition of the MLPSI, there has been little or no research conducted in this area in Ireland. As a result, the perceptions of a wide-range of stakeholders about the ideal conditions necessary for the implementation of a modern language at primary level would be an interesting piece of research to conduct. In the interest of full disclosure, it is important to note that I was a Regional Adviser for the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative for five years, 2007 until its untimely and ultimately short-sighted abolition in 2012.	

Research aims and objectives
The aim of this research is to use qualitative methods in order to examine the perceptions of a variety of stake-holders with regard to the potential of modern language provision at primary level in the Republic of Ireland. These stakeholders include:



- The Professional participants would include
  - Former members of the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI)
  - A selection of Primary Principals (Headteachers) (both MLPSI and non-MLPSI)
  - A selection of Primary teachers (both MLPSI and non-MLPSI)
  - A selection of former Peripatetic Language Teachers
  - A selection of teaching staff involved in Initial Teacher Training in the Republic of Ireland
  - Potentially involve professionals from Wales, Scotland or England (for various reasons, but particularly due to the relatively recent implementation of primary modern languages in these countries which are in close proximity to Ireland).

It is important to acknowledge the small scale of this research and the limitations in terms of any grand claims that could be made. However, it should still give 'food for thought' in terms of any potential that may exist for primary languages provision, identifying both the positive elements and challenges to be overcome. Furthermore, by engaging with the different groups of stakeholders it would be possible to triangulate ideas around the inclusion of MFL in the curriculum in a more holistic way, thus adding strength to the research design and supporting the validity and reliability of the qualitative approach.

Research Design:
The research will take place in two steps. Firstly, an initial snowball sample of all participant groups will be presented with an online qualitative survey which will present a variety of questions regarding their perceptions of primary modern languages.

It is important to note that pupils will be presented with a different survey, in pupil-friendly language, identifying their particular views on language learning focusing on such areas as how important languages are in their opinion, how they would like to learn a language and how it may be useful in the future.

The survey will in turn be used to recruit focus group participants (2-3 focus groups per sector, with a maximum of 4 members per group).

These focus group discussions will be an iterative process, ensuring that the procedure and method are systematic and recursive. Drawing on foundations of social constructionism, the focus group will be structured in two parts:

1. A scenario-based task for the group which will relate directly to the research question
2. An interview format with key questions that may not have been answered in the first part

The triangulation of perceptions should then give a worthy contribution to the research, presenting an interesting and reasonably thorough indication as to the perceived ideal conditions necessary for primary modern languages to be integrated into the curriculum in the Republic of Ireland.

The triangulation objectives are

- To identify the perceived benefits of, and barriers to, implementing a primary modern languages programme in the Irish primary school curriculum
- To identify and examine the potential ways to overcome such barriers within the constraints of the Irish primary school system.

Evaluation design

The online survey will be circulated to a snowball sample of professionals (as outlined), parents and pupils. The first page of the online survey will include a box to give informed consent to taking part in the initial survey and at the end of the survey a box will also be provided for participants to state their willingness (or not) to take part in a focus group. An option will also be given for participants to receive a summary of findings. Anonymity for all will be ensured and no names or addresses will be included in the survey, unless the participants opt in to the focus group process, which will involve their completion of a contact details box in the survey.

For both adult and pupil participants, the consent section of the survey will present a clear route for participants to withdraw from the research. A deadline will be set at approximately one month after the closing date of the survey, as after that the data will be collated and anonymised to such an extent it would not be practicable to withdraw.

The pupil sample will be from 5th and 6th class only, as these were the classes which were part of the initial MLPSI and, in addition, older pupils will have a certain level of autonomy which will be important in taking part in the research. Consent will be given by the pupil and a parent, the latter having to provide a contact email address.

On collating the surveys, a purposive, geographical sampling will take place in order to create focus groups. Again, all participants will be presented with a clear route for participants to withdraw from the research. A deadline will be set at approximately one month after the closing date, as after that the data will be collated and anonymised to such an extent it would not be practicable to withdraw.

The focus groups will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. At that point the recorded data will be deleted.

Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis

It is envisaged that qualitative data analysis will be generated from the open ended questions on the surveys and from the focus group transcripts. The data will be analysed using Thematic analysis methods as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), potentially using NVivo software to do this.

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Singleton, D. (1989) *Language Acquisition and the Age Factor*. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Stewart, J. H. (2005) Foreign language study in elementary schools: benefits and implications for achievement in reading and maths, *Early childhood education journal*, 33(1) 11–16.

Approximate Start Date: January 2019	Approximate End Date: March 2020

6 Name of Principal Investigator or Supervisor	Email address: duignanbrendan@eircom.net	Telephone: +353 87 2835082
7 Names of other researchers or student investigators involved	1.N/A 2. 3. 4.	
8 Location(s) at which project is to be carried out	The research will be carried out largely in the Republic of Ireland, with potential adult professional participants coming from the UK, as outlined above. All pupils involved will be from the same schools and focus groups will be conducted in the schools. The geographic spread of the sample will determine final locations of focus groups.	

9 Statement of the ethical issues involved and how they are to be addressed –including a risk assessment of the project based on the vulnerability of participants, the extent to which it is likely to be harmful and	The ethical implications of this research will be explained and discussed in relation to the five ethical principles outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (Hammersley and Traianou (2012)) 1. **Minimising harm (Beneficience).** The potential risks to the participants, research and organisation involved in the research have been assessed. These are very low in relation to the researcher and organisation. The

whether there will be significant discomfort. **(This will normally cover such issues as whether the risks/adverse effects associated with the project have been dealt with and whether the benefits of research outweigh the risks)**	researcher's safety is not in question as a result of completing this work. The participants that are aged over 16 have the mental capacity to consent and those under the age of 16, the pupils in the study will have to consent themselves and produce parental consent also. There is no risk posed by covert observation; discussion of sensitive topics; invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures; tissue samples being taken, prolonged or repetitive testing or 3rd party involvement. No financial incentives will be provided and no pain is likely to result from participation. All pupils, including the eight pupils involved in focus groups, will be given a clear route to withdraw from the research and when the focus groups are conducted, they will be completed in a familiar environment in the schools that the pupils are attending. The primary investigator is Garda Vetted and will be available to discuss any issues with participants or parents if necessary. **2. Respecting Autonomy** Participation in the research is voluntary. Participants will be sent the survey with a cover sheet of explanation, consent form and a guided timeframe to complete the survey, including the tick box if they would consent to be part of the focus group research. They can then freely decide whether or not they wish to participate. Participants will be able to tick a box in the survey to state that they would like a summary of findings at the end of the research, which would involve giving contact details for this to be done. 3. **Protecting Privacy.** This is a low-risk study, however, the results will still be anonymous. The surveys will be analysed by the primary investigator. The participants in the focus groups will also be anonymous, save for their role in the research (e.g. teacher, pupil, Principal, ITT Trainer etc). No individual schools or participants will be named or identified in the process. The data will remain confidential but the collated data will be published. It will be published with the doctoral thesis and made available to interested parties. It will not be possible to connect any participant to any data used in either the thesis or any subsequent publications. All participants will be referred to using pseudonyms. **4. Offering reciprocity.** No payment or financial incentive will be offered to participants. The primary investigator will try to minimise the disruption to the participants' role by constructing the survey in a user friendly manner that will take little time to complete but yet capture the relevant information. **5. Treating people equitably.** All adult participants will be presented with the same online survey and all pupils will also be presented with the same online survey. All participants will be presented with the same routes for withdrawal and contact details for the primary investigator. Hammersley, M & Traianou, A. (2012) Ethics and Educational Research. British Educational Research Association. Online resource available online at [http://www.bera.ac.uk/resources/ethics-and-educational-research] last accessed 5/11/17

Ethical Approval From Other Bodies

	Yes ☐ **No** ☒

10 Does this research require the approval of an external body ?	If "Yes", please state which body:-
11 Has ethical approval already been obtained from that body ?	Yes ☐ -Please append documentary evidence to this form. No ☐ If "No", please state why not:- Please note that any such approvals must be obtained and documented before the project begins.

APPLICANT SIGNATURE

I hereby request ethical approval for the research as described above.
I certify that I have read the University's ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH WITH HUMANS AND OTHER ANIMALS.

Applicant Signature

9/11/17
Date

Brendan Duignan
PRINT NAME

FOR STUDENT APPLICATIONS ONLY –
Academic Support for Ethics

Academic support should be sought prior to submitting this form to the designated Ethics Committee within the Faculty

ergraduate / Postgraduate Taught application

luate Research ion

Academic Member of staff nominated by the School (consult your project tutor)

Director of Studies

I support the application for ethical approval

Academic / Director of Studies Signature

13/11/17
Date

DR CARA CALLINAN
PRINT NAME

FOR COMPLETION BY THE DESIGNATED ETHICS COMMITTEE WITHIN THE COLLEGE

Please select ONE of A, B, C or D below:

X A. Ethical approval is given to this research.

D B. Conditional ethical approval is given to this research.

Please state the condition (inc. date by which condition must be satisfied if applicable)

D C. Ethical approval cannot be given to this research but the application is referred on to the University Research Ethics Committee for higher level consideration.

Please state the reason

D D. Ethical approval cannot be given to this research and it is recommended that the research should not proceed.

Please state the reason, nind the University's ethical including the primary concern for =reedom.

Signature of the Chair of the designated Ethics Committee within the College

12/12/17

Signature Date

Chair of

APPENDIX 7: FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

[*PhD Professional:*]

University of Lincoln

Researcher: Brendan Duignan

Consent to take part in research

- I…… voluntarily agree to participate in this focus group.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from the focus group within one month after the focus group, in which case the material will be at such a stage as to make it impossible to withdraw specific details.

- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

- I understand that participation involves taking part in a focus group

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

- I agree to my focus group being audio-recorded.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain completely anonymous.

- I understand that disguised extracts from my focus group may be quoted in the final thesis.

 I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained securely by the researcher for one year.

 I understand that a transcript of my focus group in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for one year.

 I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

 I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of research participant

---------- ----------

Signature of participant Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

---------- ----------

Signature of researcher